The Lone Ranger

ADVENTURE STORIES

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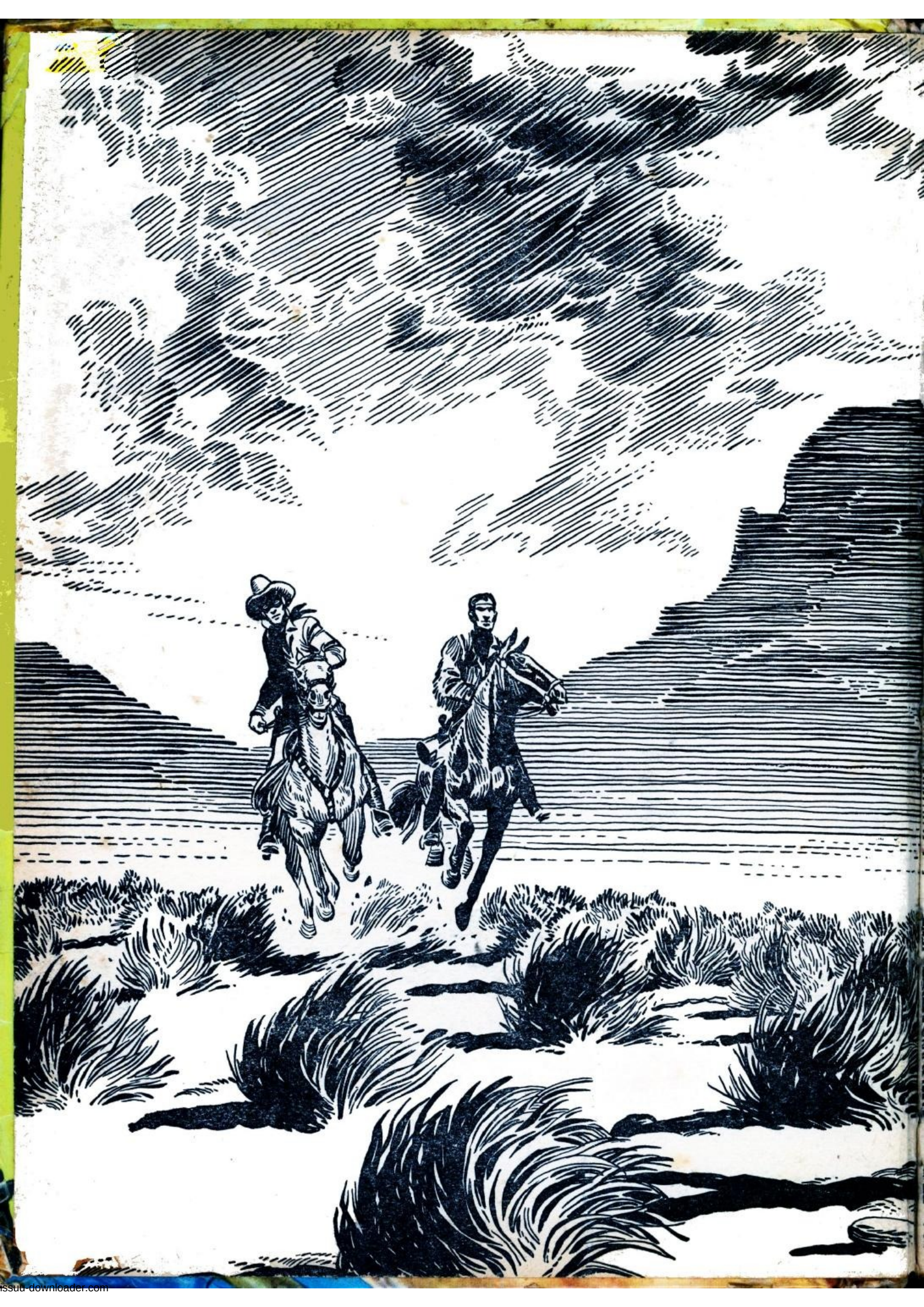

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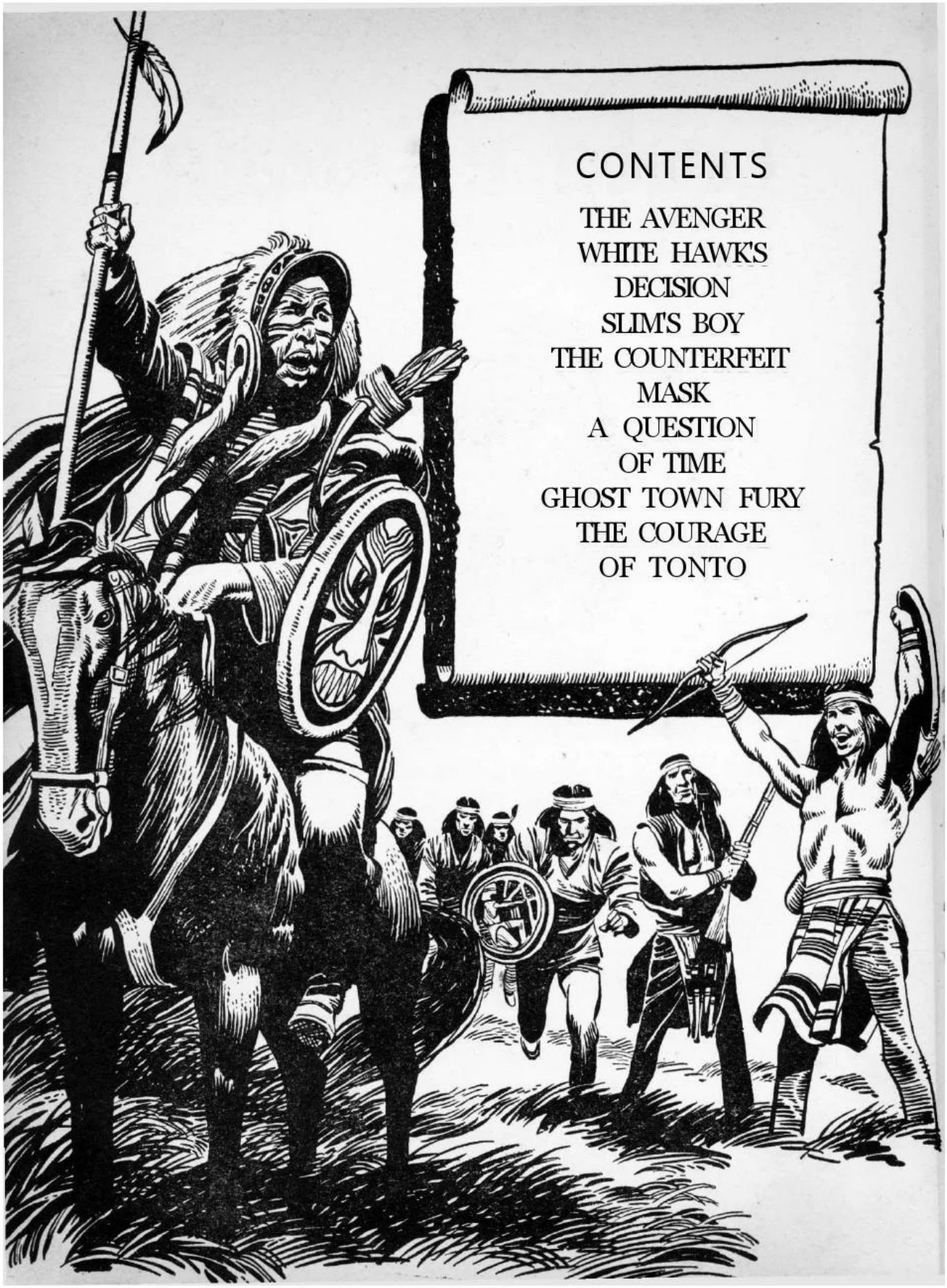

CONTENTS

THE AVENGER
WHITE HAWK'S DECISION
SLIM'S BOY
THE COUNTERFEIT MASK
A QUESTION OF TIME
GHOST TOWN FURY
THE COURAGE OF TONTO

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THE
LONE RANGER
ADVENTURE STORIES

ADAPTED BY RICHARD LEWIS
FROM THE TELEVISION SERIES
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THE AVENGER

"I tell you, we must drive crime from Cottonwood!"

Jason Rote pointed an accusing finger at the crowd of ranchers and townsmen who stood looking up at him as he addressed them from the back of a wagon parked outside the town's livery stable.

"You pioneers are opening up this glorious West with your cattle ranches and your ploughed lands—but will you protect and defend that land? Will you stand against the criminals who use their guns to gain power over you? "

The tall speaker glared down at the circle of faces. "Remember what George Washington said . . . "

"Ah! Who cares about George Washington?" A short, dark man pushed his way through to the front of the crowd and fixed the man on the wagon with a jeering stare.

Jason Rote stared back. "There!" he pointed. "Look at the worst sinner of all—little Dave Spence. Look at the little killer who brazenly mocks the words of the Father of our Country!"

Spence shifted the cigarette from one corner of his mouth to the other. His right hand hung close to his gun. "I'm big enough to handle you, you loud-mouthed reformer!"

Jason Rote's son, a sensitive looking young man in his early twenties,

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standing behind his father on the wagon, took an anxious step forward.

"Look at this braggart!" went on the speaker, unmindful of the danger below. "A man whose ugly little soul is dark with . . ."

Dave Spence's shot cut short the flow of words with a startling suddenness. For a brief moment Jason Rote stared glassily at the man with the smoking gun, then his legs crumpled and he fell with a thud to the wagon boards.

"Father!" Mark Rote sprang towards the fallen man.

The gunman turned to face the crowd. "You want some more?" he hissed as he moved through the group of frozen and fearful onlookers and swung himself on to his horse.

As Dave Spence sank his spurs and wheeled out of town, no one noticed an Indian detach himself from the rear of the crowd and run towards his waiting paint horse.

Close by the rocky trail which led out of Cottonwood a man kicked some loose earth over the remains of a campfire. He was above average height, muscular, and the top half of his weather-beaten face was partly concealed by a black mask. The Lone Ranger tramped on the earth to make double sure that the fire was out before walking over to his big white horse, Silver. He was about to rswing himself into the saddle when the sound of approaching hoofbeats made him turn. Up the trail came a horse being ridden at a furious pace, and as the rider drew level he turned in his saddle and fired two shots

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behind him. It was then that the masked man noticed a second horse and rider.

"Tonto!" breathed the Lone Ranger as he leapt into his saddle and moved out into the centre of the trail.

"Him outlaw! Kill Jason Rote!" cried the Indian as he flashed by without slackening pace.

The Lone Ranger sent Silver pounding after the other two, and it was not long before the white horse had drawn level with the Indian's.

"He's making for that pass!" shouted the Lone Ranger above the pounding of hooves.

The gunman pulled his horse off the trail and rode straight for a narrow pass, at the entrance to which he leapt from the saddle and scrambled upwards until he reached a cup-shaped depression surroundeu by-huge boulders. There he knelt and poked out his rifle, a confident grin on his sweat-covered face.

Riding into the pass, the Lone Ranger and Tonto were greeted by the whine of a bullet as it bit into the ground at their horses' feet. As one man they dived behind some sheltering rocks.

"He has a good position, Tonto." The Lone Ranger was peering upwards. "But if you cover me I could rush him . . ."

Tonto shook his head. "Too dangerous, Kemo Sabay. Me have idea. Look!" The Indian pointed to the side of the pass opposite the gunman where there was a narrow gully which could be climbed to a

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height of about forty feet. "Me climb there!"

"Not high enough, Tonto. You couldn't hit him from there."

"Not hit him," agreed the Indian, "but make him jump. You see. You keep him busy."

The Lone Ranger nodded and began pumping bullets in Spence's direction, turning now and then t6 watch his friend's progress up the gully. When the Indian was as high as he could go the masked man cupped his hands. "Better give up, Spence!" he called. "You'll get a fair trial!"

"No, thanks!" came the answering shout. "I'm happy here!"

The Lone Ranger raised his hand as a signal to Tonto and the Indian started firing at the sheer rock wall behind the gunman. From Tonto's higher position his bullets splashed off the rock and ricochetted down around Spence.

"Wait!" screamed the gunman. "I give up!"

"Throw out your guns," called the Lone Ranger.

Tonto stopped firing and at once a rifle and two revolvers came flying out of the gunman's hideout, followed closely by Spence himself, a much shaken Spence, his hands held high.

Later that same day, the Lone Ranger and Tonto were in the Sheriff's office at Cottonwood. Dave Spence had been placed safely behind bars by Judge Talbot, a grim and wiry ancient whose one and only hobby was knitting.

sadly. "I can jail 'em or hang 'em, but I'm past the age to be chasing 'em down. We owe you some thanks, Ranger, for catchin' Spence."

The Judge took a bag of knitting from his desk and began to work away at it.

"Can't you hire a new marshal?" asked the masked man.

"Everybody's either afraid of Dave Spence—or they owe Ben Jordan money."

"Jordan is Spence's partner?"

The old man nodded over his knitting. "They run the town . . . Speak of the devil—meet Mr. Jordan."

A rather podgy man in a brightly coloured vest stormed into the office. "Judge, who's this man, and what right has he to arrest Dave Spence?"

"Every citizen has the right to arrest a criminal," said the Lone Ranger quietly.

Jordan glared at the masked man and then at the Judge, who nodded over his clicking needles. "Citizen's arrest, Ben. All legal and law-abidin'."

"Law-abidin'—with a mask?" shouted Jordan. "Anyway, what's Dave's bail?" He pulled out a roll of notes.

"No bail on a murder charge," said the old man calmly. "Dave Spence'll get a fair trial—then we'll hang him."

Jordan thrust his money away and made for the door. "The rope's not made that'll hang Dave Spence—in Cottonwood," were his parting words.

As the door slammed shut Judge

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Talbot peered at the wool between his fingers. "Tsk-tsk-tsk," he muttered. "Made me drop a stitch. My nerves aren't what they used to be."

The Lone Ranger chuckled. "Come on, Tonto, I want to call on Jason Rote's son before we leave Cottonwood."

The Judge put his knitting aside and reached for his hat. "I'll go along with you, Ranger. Mark's all alone now. Might be he needs some help."

The three men found Mark Rote grimly oiling and loading a gun.

"We were wonderin', son," began the Judge, "whether you'd be wantin' any help now that your father ..."

The young man leapt to his feet, waving his gun at the Judge. "I don't need any help as long as I have this." His eyes stared wildly as he turned to the Lone Ranger. "But I have to thank you for delivering my father's murderer to me."

"I didn't deliver him to you, son," said the masked man quietly. "I delivered him to the law ..."

"The law stands for justice—and justice demands that I kill him!" hissed Mark Rote.

"Does it?" said the Judge kindly. "Not in my book. Now, look here, Mark, you get that nonsense out of your head. Quiet down and put that gun away before you hurt yourself."

"Oh, I won't hurt myself, Judge. Here . . ." Mark pushed the gun towards the Judge, holding it with his forefinger through the trigger-guard. As the old man reached for it, Mark spun the gun on his finger, the butt slapped into his palm and his thumb cocked the hammer, all in one lightning-fast movement.

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"The Road Agent's Spin!" gasped the old man. "Now, where'd you ever learn that?"

" My father taught me two things," replied Mark, "speed with the gun, and respect for the great men of American history. All my life I've wondered why those two things went together." He spun the gun into his holster, uncocking it as it slid into the leather. "Now I know! It was to prepare me for this day—when I shall avenge a great American by destroying his killer."

As Mark made for the door, the Lone Ranger held him by the arm. "No, Mark! Wait!"

In fanatical fury the young man wrenched himself free.

"Easy, son!" begged the masked man, grabbing Mark's arm again.

Beside himself with rage, the young man swung his fist at the Lone Ranger, barely missing his target. The masked man, now forced into action, brought up his own fist in a short chopping jolt to Mark's jaw. . . .

"Sorry, Mark." The Lone Ranger caught the young man as he fell, and carried him over to a couch.

"Don't feel too bad," said Judge Talbot. "You had to do it for his own sake. Poor kid, he's the most gentle youngster in all Cottonwood, but I reckon his pappy's death was quite a jolt."

"It was more than that," said the Lone Ranger gravely.

"You worry about boy, Kemo Sabay?" said Tonto.

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The masked man nodded. "And I'm afraid of what might happen if Dave Spence goes free."

"No chance," said Tonto. "Spence and Jordan control town—but them not control Judge here."

"No—but they might control the jury . . ."

Two days later the trial of Dave Spence was taking place in the Sheriff's office. The jury had retired to the inner office to consider their verdict and were now filing back into the courtroom. By the Judge's desk stood the prisoner, with Ben Jordan close beside him. Near the door were the Lone Ranger and Tonto.

Judge Talbot banged on his desk for order. "Jury—have you reached a verdict?"

The foreman of the jury, one Brad Stacy, a gaunt gunman who was very much in league with Ben Jordan, got to his feet. "We sure have, your honour. We find Dave innocent!"

There was an angry murmur from the few spectators who had managed to cram themselves into the room.

"Innocent?" Mark Rote was striding up to the Judge's desk. "More than half the men on that jury saw him kill my father! Is Dave Spence so powerful in this town that law and order can't touch him?"

Spence's hand was stealing slowly towards the gun in Ben Jordan's holster.

"Mark! Look out!" It was the Lone Ranger's cry.

Spence had drawn Jordan's gun and was aiming it at the young man, but before he could press the trigger Mark fired. Dave Spence thudded to the floor and lay still.

For a few seconds there was dead silence in the little court-room, then Ben Jordan spoke. "It was cold-blooded murder! Are you goin' to let him . . ."

The Judge pounded hard with his gavel. "Quiet, you! Dave drew first, and I'm not forgettin' it was *your* gun he found so handy. I rule Mark shot in self-defence." He banged his gavel once more. "Case closed. Clear the court-room!"

As the jury and Ben Jordan went out, Judge Talbot put an arm round Mark's shoulders. "Get hold of yourself, son. It's all over now."

"Over!" exclaimed Mark. "It's just begun! I've drawn the sword of righteous wrath—and with it I shall clean up this town!"

The Judge gazed thoughtfully at the young man. "If you mean what you say—and I hope you do—maybe you'd like to wear this Marshal's star?" He fished a badge from his pocket and held it out.

Mark's eyes gleamed as he took the star and pinned it on his shirt. "Proudly, sir! Proudly!" he cried. Then he turned and strode out into the street.

"You've made a serious mistake, Judge," said the Lone Ranger grimly. "You have given a madman the authority to kill." The masked man was gazing up the street to where Mark Rote was beginning to address a group of townspeople, waving his gun in the air to emphasise his words.

Later that night, the Lone Ranger

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and Tonto were camped on the outskirts of Cottonwood. They had almost finished their meal whenTonto suddenly lifted his head to listen.

"Somebody ride trail, Kemo Sabay."

A few minutes later a man rode up and dismounted by the camp fire.

"Well, if it isn't the Lone Ranger and Tonto!" The stranger held out his hand.

"Baxter Crowe!" The masked man took the hand and gave it a warm shake. " It's been a long time."

" Pretty long," agreed Baxter, " and if I wasn't so miserable this 'd sure make me happy!"

"Sounds like you'd better have some coffee and tell us what's wrong," said the Lone Ranger.

Baxter Crowe sat down by the fire and took a cup of steaming coffee from Tonto. Then he began to tell his story, a story that brought a worried look to the Lone Ranger's face.

Baxter had arrived in Cottonwood that day to arrange a farm loan from the bank, only to be confronted with a gun-brandishing Mark Rote with a Marshal's star on his shirt.

"Ordered me right out of town before I could get near the bank," complained Baxter. "Said he knew I was up to no good. I've got to get that loan or I'll lose my ranch . . ."

The Lone Ranger put a friendly hand on Baxter's shoulder. "I'll ride in and see the banker tonight. I'm sure I can swing your loan. You go on home and I'll bring it to you."

As the Lone Ranger mounted Silver to ride back to Cottonwood, two men were coming out of the town bank. They were Ben Jordan and Brad Stacy. Jordan carried a money-bag in one hand and a gun in the other.

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Looking suspiciously along the street, the two men started to run into an alley opposite, but just as they were disappearing round the corner Mark Rote strode into sight. Seeing the bank robbers he started to run after them, drawing as he went.

Crack! Stacy stumbled and fell as Mark fired. Jordan reached the end of the alley and vanished from sight.

At that moment the Lone Ranger and Tonto rode up to find Mark standing over the fallen Stacy.

"What happened?" The masked man threw himself from his saddle.

"Bank robbery." Mark pointed towards Stacy. "I destroyed this sinner, but Baxter Crowe got away!"

"Baxter!" exclaimed Tonto. "But we just see him riding home!"

"It was him all right," said Mark scornfully. "He told me he was going to steal from the bank."

Tonto was examining Stacy. "Him dead all right, Kemo Sabay," said the Indian looking up. "And him smell of horses—like stable . . ."

"Stable!" said the Lone Ranger sharply. "Tonto, ride to Baxter's ranch—fast. Tell him to hide out before Mark comes hunting him. I must find out who did rob the bank—and I think I may find the answer at Ben Jordan's livery stable."

Walking silently along the deserted street, the Lone Ranger slid into the darkness of Jordan's stable, at the far end of which was a door marked OFFICE—PRIVATE.

Carefully the masked man opened

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the door and went inside . . . Something hit him hard on the head and he slid into unconsciousness . . .

When the Lone Ranger came to he was astride Silver, his hands tied in front of him, his holsters empty. Riding ahead, with Silver on a lead rein was Ben Jordan.

"No use feelin' for your guns, Ranger," jeered Jordan, looking back.

The masked man shook his head to clear it. "And there's no use you thinking you can get away with this. Tonto knows I came to see you."

Jordan grinned cruelly. "Yeh, that's why it would've been bad for your body to be found at my livery stable. You got to vanish—up in these hills."

Glancing round, the Lone Ranger saw that they were already at a considerable height and approaching the brink of a sheer precipice. He strained at the rope.

"Nice thing about a skeleton," mused Jordan, "it's hard to tell who it used to belong to."

The gunman dismounted and peered down into the rocky defile below. Then he nodded with grim satisfaction and drew his gun.

"This is it, Ranger." Jordan walked over to the mounted man and raised his revolver. As he pressed the trigger the Lone Ranger kicked upwards with his right foot, sending the gun flying from Jordan's hand and over the edge of the cliff. The masked man, having little use of his bound hands, lost his balance and fell to the ground, while Jordan's horse, startled by the gunshot, reared up and bolted.

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Jordan watched his horse disappear, then, with a grunt of fury, he drew a vicious looking knife and charged at his prisoner who had scrambled to his feet a bare yard from the cliff edge. As Jordan lunged, the Lone Ranger twisted aside to avoid the blade. The momentum of Jordan's sudden lunge carried him to the brink, where he tottered for a moment in a vain effort to maintain his balance, before crashing into the depths of the canyon below.

It was not long before the Lone Ranger had his hands free and was riding hard back towards Cottonwood.

On the outskirts of the town he met his Indian friend.

"Tonto, did you warn Baxter Crowe?"

"Yes, Kemo Sabay. Him hiding out now at Split Rock—but young Marshal after him!"

"Split Rock! He'll be trapped there!" The masked man wheeled his horse and was soon galloping off in the direction from which he had come.

As he approached Split Rock Gully, a narrow dead-end defile, he saw Mark Rote straightening up from some tracks he had been following. And as the masked man drew closer he saw a smile of bloodthirsty triumph on the young Marshal's face.

"You're trapped, sinner!" shouted Mark, drawing his gun and starting up the gully. "Repent, Baxter, while you can!"

The Lone Ranger dismounted and went up to Mark. " He has nothing to repent. Ben Jordan was the guilty man. I have the stolen money to prove it."

"No, no, it was Baxter," shouted the young man, his eyes staring wildly. "You're trying to save him by returning the money, but it won't work. I tell you he's a killer!"

"He's not a killer, Mark, but *you* will be if you gun him down. He's unarmed, just as I am. Think, Mark, what do you think your father would say if he saw you like this—a man with a star on his shirt and blood-lust in his heart?"

"Me? Blood-lust?" Mark Rote's face showed clearly the struggle that was going on inside him. Then, suddenly, his chin dropped on his chest. The gun fell from his hand.

"Easy, son." The Lone Ranger put an encouraging hand on the young man's shoulder.

"I'll take care of him." It was Baxter Crowe who stepped from behind a rock.

"He's going to need all the care you can give him, Baxter," said the Lone Ranger. "Take him into town while I get the money back to the bank."

The masked man walked over to Silver, swung into the saddle and was soon galloping away.

At the sound of hoofbeats Mark Rote looked up. "He helped me. The masked man helped me—and I didn't even thank him . . .!"

"You don't have to, boy." Baxter Crowe was gazing proudly after the white horse and its rider. "Nobody has to thank the Lone Ranger!"

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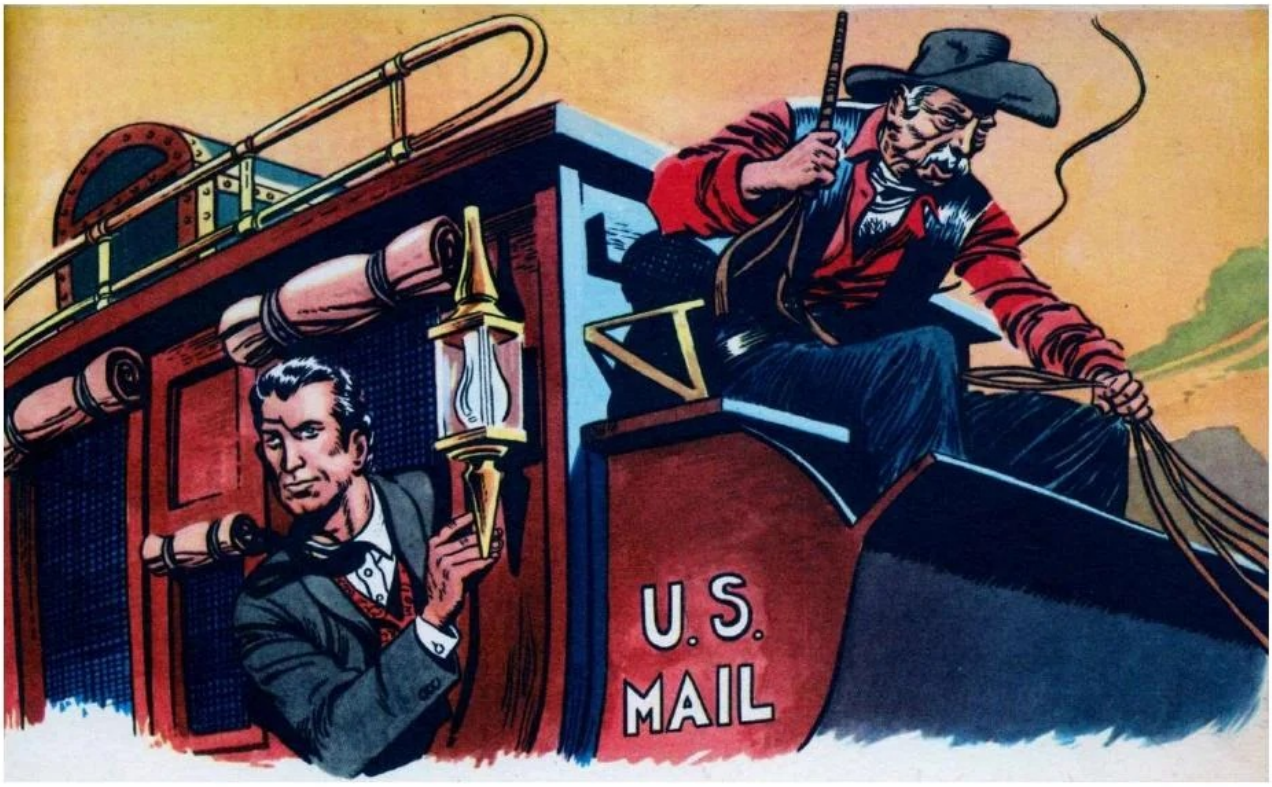

WHITE HAWK'S DECISION

A stagecoach rounded a bend in a dusty Western road. It was travelling at an easy pace, and its solitary passenger, a young Indian dressed in an eastern-style suit, was leaning out of the window drinking in the peaceful scene around him.

Suddenly, that peace was shattered by two shots, fired in rapid succession. The Indian's head vanished inside the coach. The driver struggled to control the frightened horses. And as two more shots rang out, the horses bolted, charging headlong down the trail.

It was at this moment that two horsemen appeared on a ridge overlooking the scene. They were the Lone Ranger and Tonto.

"I'll go after the stage, Tonto!" cried the masked man, spurring Silver to a gallop. "You follow those men!" He pointed towards some rocks behind which two figures were running.

As Tonto set his paint horse after the gunmen, the Lone Ranger was pounding in pursuit of the runaway stage. A few giant strides and Silver was alongside the frightened horses. The Lone Ranger leaned from his saddle, seized the bridle of the lead horse and pulled the team to a stop.

"Just sit where you are, masked man!" said a voice, and the Lone Ranger turned to find himself looking into the barrel of a rifle in the hands of the stage driver.

"I'm not the one who shot at you, Mister," said the masked man calmly.

The driver screwed up his eyes and peered suspiciously down at the Lone

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Ranger. "Just throw down those guns of yours 'fore I blast you!"

As the masked man was about to drop his revolvers, the Indian stepped out of the coach, a smile of recognition on his handsome face. "He's no outlaw, driver!"

" Little Hawk!" The Lone Ranger jumped from his horse and took both the Indian's outstretched hands.

"It's been a long time, my friend," smiled the young Indian.

The driver lowered his rifle and removed his hat to scratch the back of his head. "You *know* this masked man?"

"Yes, and I would trust him with my life," replied Little Hawk seriously.

"I didn't realise the years had passed so quickly, Little Hawk," said the Lone Ranger. "Are you back from college?"

The Indian grinned and pointed back along the trail. "Yes. But for a moment back there I had my doubts whether I *would* return."

"They must've been after *you,* son," interrupted the driver. "I ain't carryin' nothin' valuable."

The Lone Ranger nodded his agreement and pointed to two neat bullet holes in the stage door. "They were aiming at you all right, Little Hawk. Any idea why?"

The Indian frowned and shook his head. "I have no enemies that I know of, and I am carrying nothing more valuable than a little knowledge_____"

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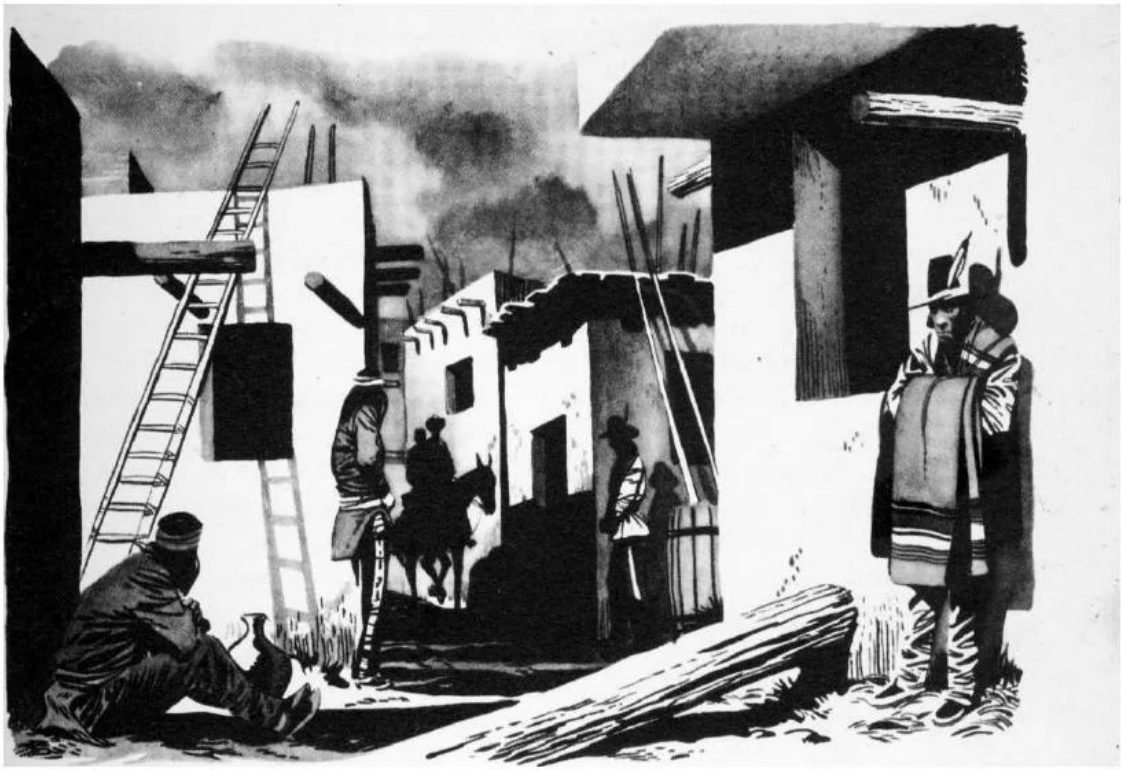

From inside the stage the masked man pulled out his Indian friend's Suitcase and carried it over to Silver. "You go on, driver. I'll take Little Hawk to his village."

"Good luck, Indian!" cried the driver as, with a slap of the reins, the stage lumbered off in a cloud of dust.

It had only gone a few yards when Tonto galloped up and skidded his horse to a stop. "I lose men in rocks, Kemo Sabay. They ride fast and leave no tracks on hard ground."

Then Tonto saw Little Hawk. "Him on stage?" he asked.

"Your memory is short, Tonto," grinned the young Indian. "Don't you recognise me?"

Tonto came closer, then slowly his face broke into a smile of recognition. "It is Little Hawk! You have grown so much I did not know you."

"We're taking him to his village, Tonto," explained the Lone Ranger.

"And you'll stay for a visit, won't you?" asked Little Hawk. "My father will be pleased to see you."

The masked man nodded. "We'll stay—until certain questions are answered." And he added grimly, "Someone tried to kill you, Little Hawk. I intend to find out who—and why!"

Less than an hour later the Lone Ranger and Tonto rode into a small Indian settlement, with Little Hawk behind the masked man on Silver's broad back. The village consisted of two rows of poor adobe huts, between which ran a narrow, dusty street.

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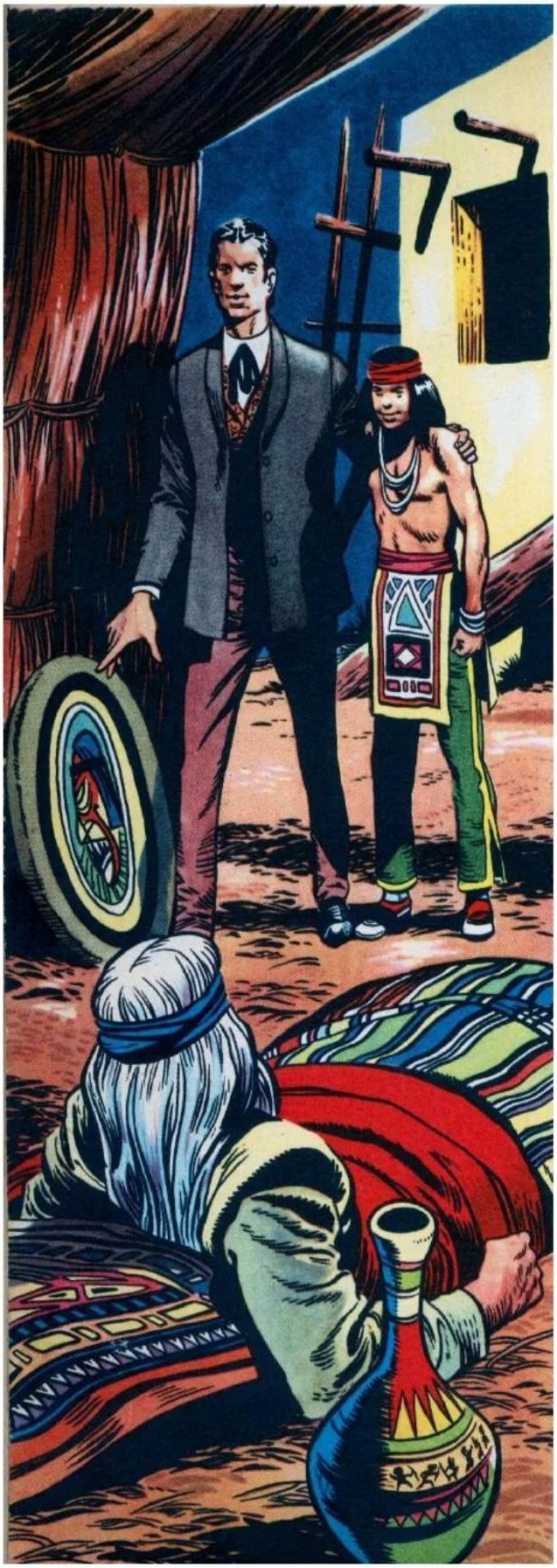

Everywhere there were signs of decay and poverty.

Little Hawk looked around him with an unbelieving expression on his face. "I looked forward so much to coming home, and now . . . it's like a strange village. Everything is old—and tired."

The Lone Ranger and Tonto reined their horses in front of one of the huts at the end of the street, and as the three men dismounted a young Indian boy came running up.

"Little Hawk! Welcome home!" cried the boy excitedly.

Little Hawk grabbed the youngster and swung him round. "Arrowfoot! Is this the same skinny boy I left four years ago?"

The boy grinned proudly. "I am a strong brave now. In another moon I will be twelve. Are you going to stay, Little Hawk? Did you learn many things at the white man's school? Are you going to help us? Who are these men? What . . .?"

"Slow down, Arrowfoot," laughed Little Hawk. "Your tongue is swifter than the deer. I will answer all your questions later. Now I must see my father." Patting the boy's shoulder, he walked into the hut, followed by the Lone Ranger and Tonto.

Inside the hut an old man lay dozing on a pallet of colourful Indian blankets. His wrinkled face looked weak and tired. This was White Hawk, Chief of the tribe.

"Father!"

The man on the blankets opened his dim eyes and raised himself to peer at his visitors. "Little Hawk!"

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The young Indian smiled and approached the Chief. "It is good to be back, Father. Are you well? "

White Hawk smiled weakly. "I have no sickness, my son. It is only the passing of years. . . . These are your friends?"

"Yes, Father. Surely you remember the masked man and Tonto?";

"Now I remember well," replied the old man. " It was you who helped my people get this land." He paused. "I am sorry you have to see us like this. My people are poor—without hope. They have no leader—I am old. But my son here will soon be Chief. Maybe he can save our people."

Little Hawk knelt at the old man's side. "I have plans, Father," he said eagerly. " I learned many things; how to irrigate our land—crop rotation . l . All I ask is hard work from our people! If they will only listen to me . .

"And why should they listen to you, brother?" said a voice.

The Lone Ranger turned to see a tall, powerfully-built young Indian framed in the doorway of the hut, his face a mask of bitterness and hatred. This was Fleet Horse, Little Hawk's younger brother.

"Greetings, Fleet Horse!" exclaimed Little Hawk. "It is good to see you again."

" I am not so full of happiness as you are, brother," growled Fleet Horse. "Did you enjoy your life with the white man?"

The Lone Ranger and Tonto exchanged worried glances.

"The white men were good to me,"

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said Little Hawk, trying his best to be friendly.

"Your brother has good news," broke in the old Chief. "He is going to bring new life to our land again—with white man's medicine . . ."

Fleet Horse scowled and turned to the Lone Ranger. "White man's medicine is worthless. It has done nothing for us but take our land away—and give us stones!"

"But your land *can* be good, Fleet Horse." The Lone Ranger's voice was calm. "If you work it. Your brother will show you how."

"My brother is full of lies!" hissed the young Indian from the doorway.

"Take that back!" Little Hawk started towards his brother, but the Lone Ranger's arm held him back.

"White man's lies!" shouted Fleet Horse. "White man go! Not wanted!"

Little Hawk was trying to control *his* anger. "He is my friend. He stay!"

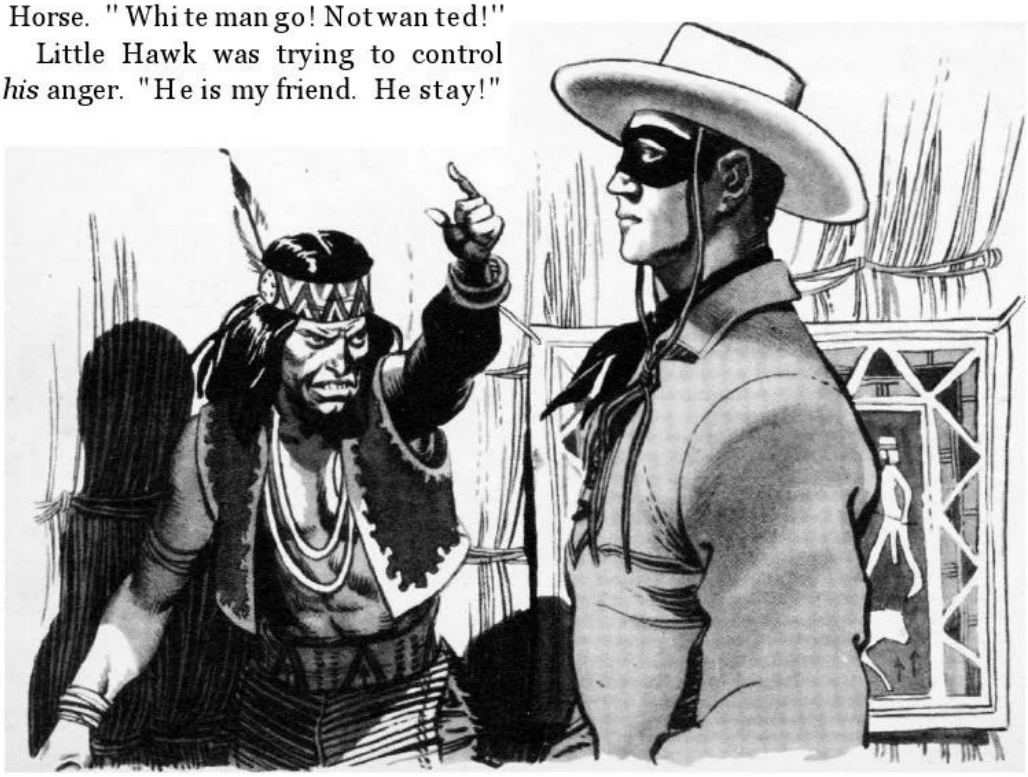
"Then we will settle it Indian way. We will fight." Fleet Horse's blazing eyes shifted challengingly to the Lone Ranger.

The masked man sighed. "If it must be, Fleet Horse—I accept. You name the weapons."

"The stick—the Indian stick. I will await—there!" Fleet Horse pointed outside, glared at the occupants of the hut, and walked away.

"Fleet Horse dangerous man, Kemo Sabay," said Tonto, going to the door to look after the departing Indian.

"I know, Tonto," replied the Lone Ranger thoughtfully, "and the danger is that he will interfere with Little Hawk's plans. Maybe if he is beaten with his own stick it will take some of the venom out of his sting."



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The old man on the blankets was gazing up at the masked man, his face drawn and humiliated. "I am sorry, friend. I have no pride in my young son. He will not listen to me."

"You have one son to be proud of, White Hawk. As for the other—well, he may change . . ."

And with that the Lone Ranger and Tonto went out of the hut.

Outside they found a group of Indians talking together in hushed tones. In the centre of the group stood Fleet Horse, silent and expressionless.

As the Lone Ranger approached, one of the villagers handed Fleet Horse a strong stick about five feet in length, painted in vivid colours and tufted at each end with feathers. The Indian took a firm grip with both hands, planted his feet well apart and held out the stick for the Lone Ranger to take his grip on it. This the masked man did, and the two antagonists stood grimly facing each other, waiting for the signal to start the contest.

The stick fight was a contest not only of strength, but of cunning, each man trying to throw the other off balance and wrest the stick from his opponent's grasp—the winner to retain the stick, the loser to be laughed at and humiliated.

"Go!" cried Fleet Horse.

At first it was a trial of sheer strength, each man trying the other out, seeking the advantage of leverage. Then Fleet Horse made a sudden move, twisting the stick

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violently upwards. But the masked man was ready for such a trick. With a grunt he forced the stick down again, and once more the two men stood face to face, their muscles straining, the sweat pouring from them. Slowly, very slowly, the Lone Ranger was forcing the stick downwards against Fleet Horse's upward pull. Then, suddenly, the Indian threw his whole weight downwards. Both men fell to the ground, rolling over and over as they each tried desperately to snatch the stick from the other's hold. Fleet Horse's knees came up and he kicked out at the Lone Ranger, who almost lost his grip, but managed to hang on and struggle to his feet, still holding the stick. Breathing heavily, the masked man gave a sudden twist, turned his back on his opponent, and with a great heave sent Fleet Horse sailing over his head and down a nearby embankment!

The Lone Ranger stood there, perspiring and triumphant, the stick still firmly in his hands, as a murmur of admiration spread through the crowd of watching Indians. Then the masked man turned and walked back into the Chief's hut.

"The trophy, Chief," said the Lone Ranger respectfully, holding out the painted stick to the old man.

I "Kemo Sabay! Look out!"

At Tonto's cry, the Lone Ranger swung round just in time to grasp Fleet Horse's wrist as the Indian was about to send an evil-looking knife into his back. Holding the knife-hand high, the masked man sent his free hand thudding into Fleet Horse's midriff. The knife dropped

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from the Indian's grasp as he doubled up on the ground.

Tonto bent to pick up the weapon. "You fight well, Kemo Sabay. Maybe him learn lesson."

Slowly Fleet Horse pulled himself to his feet, stared angrily about him and stalked out of the hut.

Later that day, at a camp a few miles from the Indian village, three men were in earnest conversation. They were the two white men who had fired on the stage coach—and Fleet Horse, the Indian.

"You have failed in your mission! Why?" Fleet Horse was saying angrily.

"Settle down, son. We had trouble." Frank Carter put a hand on the Indian's shoulder. "A masked man and an Indian ran us off."

Fleet Horse scowled. "I have heard. Even now they are with my father."

"Are you under suspicion?" asked the other man quickly.

Fleet Horse shook his head. "No. The attack on Little Hawk has been laid to white men—just as we planned. But my brother is still alive and will become Chief. This we did not plan!"

"We'll have another chance," growled Carter. "I tell you, we'll get him. You know we're on the side of the red man—the side of justice. Go back to your village and we'll think of another plan. And this time it'll *work*\"

Fleet Horse rose to his feet. "It must be so—before my brother spreads his white poison among the tribe."

"It'll be as you say, *Chief*" smiled

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Carter as the Indian sprang on to his horse and kicked the animal to a gallop.

The two men watched Fleet Horse until he disappeared behind an outcrop of rock. Then they turned to grin evilly at one another.

"That should keep him hot for a while." Carter kicked some wood into the camp-fire. "Hotter he is, more chance we got to make him lead his people into war, kill 'em off, and move right in an' buy up that Buffalo Canyon land."

Next morning, Little Hawk was addressing a crowd of villagers outside his father's hut.

". . . and our land will produce crops—enough to feed us all!" he was saying eagerly.

"But how, Little Hawk?" asked a young Indian in the front rank of listeners. "There is not enough rain. . . ."

"We do not need rain!" cried the Chief's son. "We have the river. We will bring the river to our land. Lend me your hands and I will fill your bellies and make your hearts glad!"

There was a murmur of approval among the villagers as an old Indian stepped forward. "I am an old man —but I will work!" he said firmly. And at once there were other cries of, "And I!" "And I!"

As the villagers dispersed, the Lone Ranger and Tonto rode up and dismounted beside Little Hawk.

"We have arranged for supplies, Little Hawk," said the masked man.

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'Axes, shovels, hoes—everything. The white settlers have grub-staked you."

The Indian grinned happily. "Now I must tell my father."

As Little Hawk went into the hut, Tonto turned to the Lone Ranger. "Him happy—but you sad . . ."

"Yes, Tonto. That attack on the stage yesterday—it doesn't take much to realise that Fleet Horse was at the bottom of it. And unless I miss my guess those white men are setting brother against brother—for their own greedy purposes."

"But this tribe very poor. What white men gain?"

"That's the mystery, Tonto—and that's what we have to find out. Hello, Arrowfoot!" The Lone Ranger looked down to see the Indian boy standing staring at his gun-belt.

"Are—they really silver bullets?" asked the boy, reaching out a finger to touch one of them.

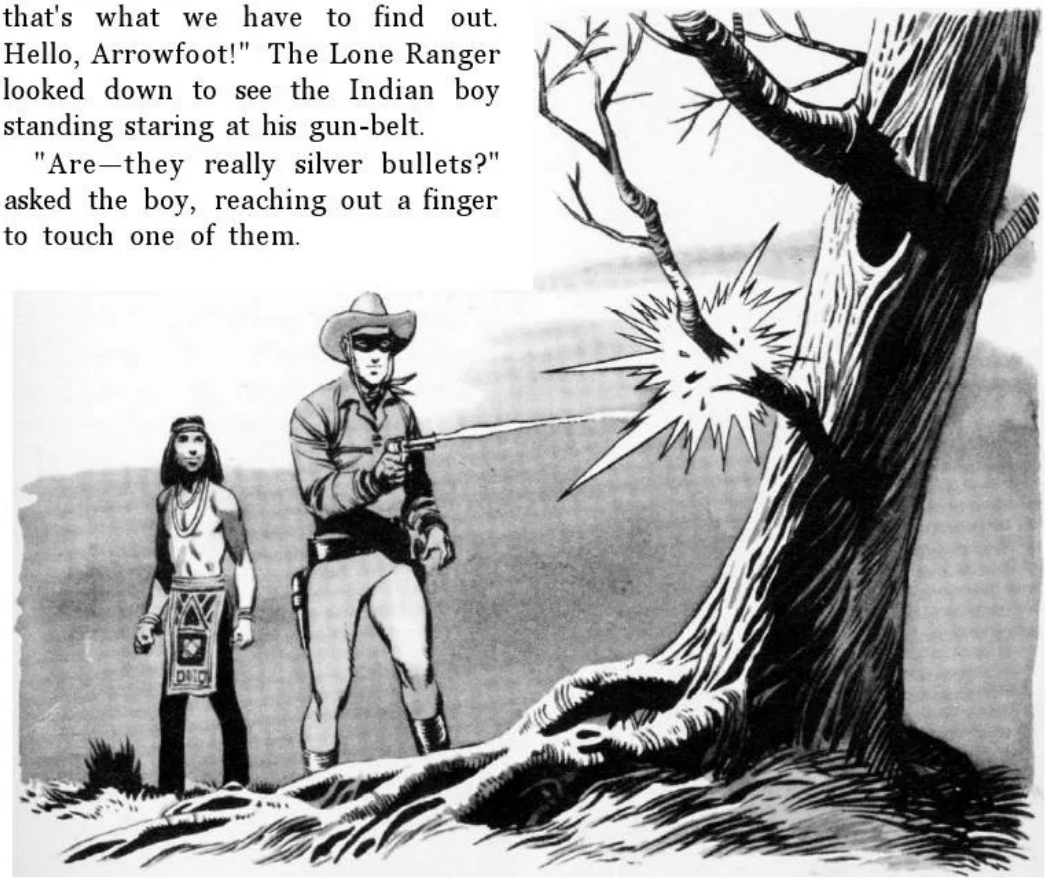
"That's right," smiled the masked man.

"Arrowfoot has heard much of masked man's magic with the guns. Will you show me?"

"I'd be glad to show you, son," said the masked man, drawing one of his guns and firing three rapid shots in the direction of a dead tree some distance away. One of the rotten branches snapped clean off and fell to the ground.

"It is truly magic!" gasped the astonished boy.

"Not magic, son—just a matter of control and aim," laughed the Lone Ranger.



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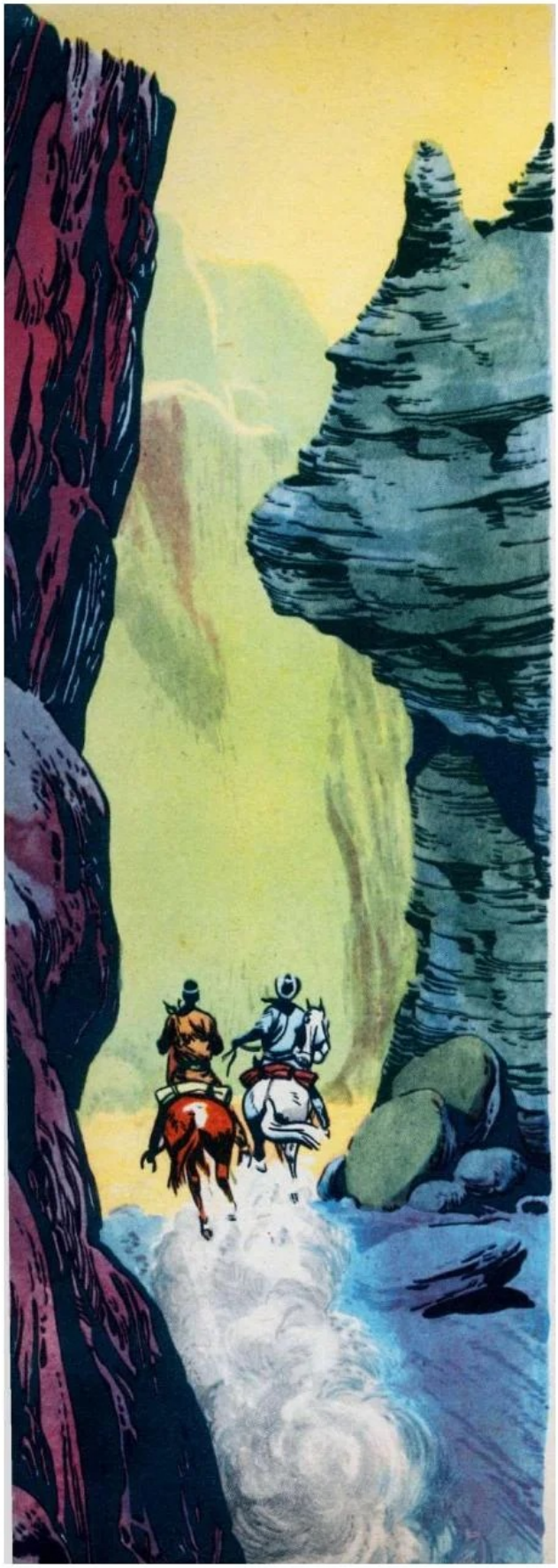

"Can I have the bullets?"

"If you can find them."

Arrowfoot ran off to search around the tree, and he was soon back holding something in the palm of his hand.

"I find one! This is *real* silver, masked man?"

The Lone Ranger nodded.

"Now I have two pieces of silver." Arrowfoot reached into his pocket and pulled out a small piece of ore. "It's just like the bullet, isn't it?"

The Lone Ranger glanced at Tonto and took the piece of ore from the boy's hand. "Yes, it's silver all right, Arrowfoot. Where did you find it?"

"In Buffalo Canyon. Found more, too—but I give them to my friends."

The Lone Ranger was looking thoughtful as he handed the ore back to the boy. "Tonto," he said, "I think we had better take a ride out to Buffalo Canyon!"

As the masked man and Tonto moved towards their horses, Arrowfoot watched them, puzzled at the Ranger's sudden interest in Buffalo Canyon.

And in the canyon a short time later the Lone Ranger found much to interest him. He had just chipped a piece of rock from the mountainside.

"Look at this, Tonto! It's silver ore all right. This is the reason for the attack on Little Hawk. Someone wants this land!"

As the Lone Ranger spoke, two shots rang out suddenly, the bullets whining off the rock above his head.

The masked man and the Indian dived for cover.

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"They're over there! Cover me, Tonto!"

The Lone Ranger began to zig-zag from rock to rock as his Indian friend kept up a rapid fire.

So intent were the gunmen on returning Tonto's shots that they failed to notice the masked man creeping up on them from behind, i The first they knew of the trouble in store for them was when a blue-clad figure landed with a thud almost between them and their heads were cracked together with a thud that echoed among the rocks. . . .

By the time Tonto ran up, the Lone Ranger had two stunned outlaws disarmed and helpless.

"These men who attack stage," said Tonto.

The Lone Ranger nodded his agreement. "And unless I'm wrong our friend Little Hawk is in grave danger. You take these two to the sheriff, Tonto. I'm riding back to the village."

The Lone Ranger's guess about Little Hawk's danger was only too correct. As the masked man leapt into Silver's saddle and set a furious gallop towards the village, Fleet Horse was climbing, unseen, on to the roof of one of the adobe huts. There he crouched, waiting . . .

Before very long, Little Hawk came up the street, going towards his father's hut, and as he passed—Fleet Horse jumped . . . A knife-blade flashed in the sunlight . . .

Out of the corner of his eye Little Hawk saw the sudden movement. He turned just in time to make the

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knife miss its mark, and the two men went sprawling in the dust. But Fleet Horse still had the knife, and although Little Hawk fought hard he found himself forced over on to his face, with his brother's knife-point pressing into his back.

It was at that moment the Lone Ranger came galloping into the village in a cloud of dust.

"Stay back, white man!" yelled Fleet Horse.

The masked man, taking in the situation at a glance, reined hard.

"Your friends have confessed, Fleet Horse!" cried the Lone Ranger. "They had found silver in Buffalo Canyon. They only wanted you to lead your people to war . . ."

"You lie!" screamed Fleet Horse. "My brother must die!"

He raised the knife to strike it home . . . But before the blow could fall, a shot cracked out and Fleet Horse fell dead beside the brother he had tried to kill.

Standing in the doorway of his hut, a smoking buffalo gun in his hands, was the old Chief, White Hawk.

"It had to be done," said the old man in a weak, sad voice. "Now they will listen to you alone, Little Hawk. You will unite our tribe in dignity •and strength. You will be our Chief."

And so it was that a few days later Little Hawk was made Chief of the tribe. In the centre of a great circle of seated Indians the old Chief placed the official robe on Little Hawk's shoulders.

Outside the circle of Indians two riders sat watching the colourful

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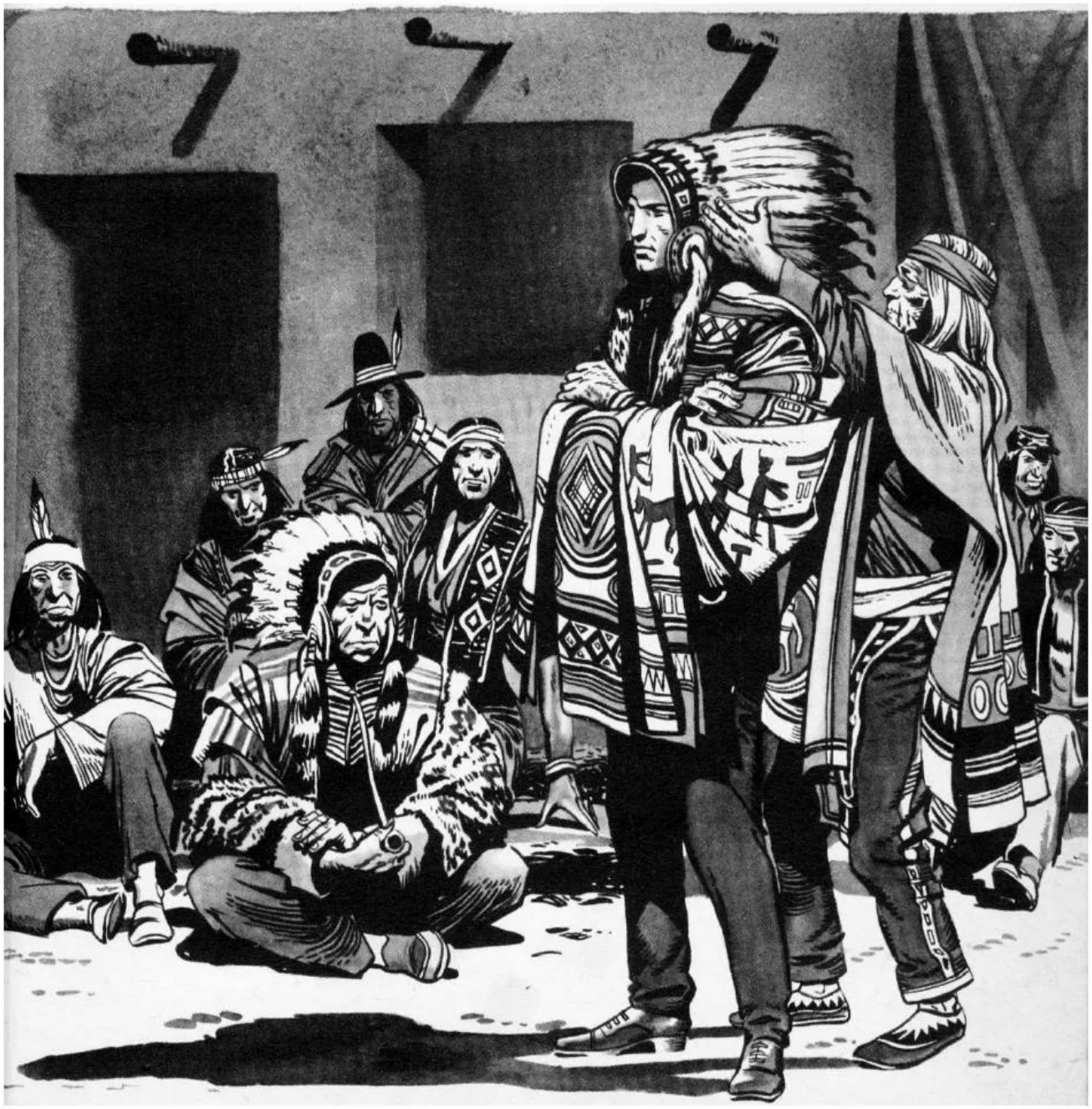
ceremony, and as the whole tribe rose to proclaim their new Chief, the Lone Ranger leaned over to speak softly in his friend's ear. "Our work here is finished, Tonto; we must go."

Tonto smiled as they wheeled their horses and rode off into the West.



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SLIM'S BOY

The Lone Ranger and Tonto were breaking camp. They had a good many miles of rough mountain trail ahead of them before sundown, so Tonto was losing no time in saddling-up. As his strong brown hands pulled the leather tight, he stiffened suddenly and lay down with his ear to the ground.

" Man come on horse, Kemo Sabay. Horse very tired—limp bad. . . ."

The Lone Ranger looked at his friend. "Wait here, Tonto." He swung himself on to Silver's broad back and urged the big horse through some trees and out on to the trail.

A man was riding towards him, and as the stranger saw the masked man, his hand dropped to his gun.

"Don't draw," said the Lone Ranger evenly. " I'm no outlaw."

The man slapped his thigh and let out a mirthless laugh. "That's rich, that is!"

The Lone Ranger rode closer. "This mask is on the side of the law."

"So's this!" laughed the stranger, pulling a spotted bandana up over his mouth.

The two men sat looking at each other in silence for a few moments. "You're Gil Ryan, aren't you?" asked the Lone Ranger at last. A

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slight widening of the other man's eyes told him his guess was correct. "Where are you heading, Gil?"

"Well, since you and me are both on the side of the law . . ." Gil Ryan paused to enjoy his little joke. ". . . I don't mind tellin' you. I'm headin' for the town of Dark Canyon, to keep a date with the lawman that put me behind bars—eight years ago."

"Sam Masters?" enquired the masked man.

"Who else?" Ryan spat on the ground and his face darkened.

"I wouldn't, if I were you," said the Lone Ranger. "Sam's the fastest draw this side Dodge City."

Ryan was grinning once more. "Is he? We'll see about that. So happens I know somethin' about Sam Masters that you don't." The gunman sank his spurs into his tired horse's flanks. "Look me up, Mister. Might be I could use you when I get my old gang together. S'long now."

The Lone Ranger moved Silver aside to let the gunman pass. "Goodbye, Gil, and take care of that horse—he's badly lamed."

As Ryan's horse limped off down the trail, the Lone Ranger watched him go. A moment later Tonto rode up to join him.

"Him bad man, Kemo Sabay. Why you let him go?"

"Because he said he was getting his old gang together, Tonto, and I thought if we gave him enough rope he might hang them all."

"But him gun for Sam Masters . . ."

"He's on a lame horse, Tonto. We'll get there before he does." The Lone Ranger paused, and added thoughtfully, "What bothers me is that he knows something about Sam that we don't . . ."

The masked man swung his big horse down off the trail, with Tonto close behind him. . . .

Next morning, in the spotlessly clean kitchen of Sam Masters' house in Dark Canyon, the Marshal's wife, Amy, was frying hotcakes. Sam liked nothing better than a pile of steaming hotcakes for his breakfast—or for any other meal, come to that. He had already seated himself at the table with a dreamy look of anticipation in his eyes when there was a knock at the door. Amy Masters wiped her hands on her apron and went to open it.

"My soul and body! The Lone Ranger!" exclaimed the woman from the doorway.

A smiling Lone Ranger walked in. "How are you, Amy? You don't look a day older than when I last saw you. How long has it been?"

"Eight mortal years," said Sam Masters, pushing back his chair and striding towards the masked man. "Where's Tonto?"

"Tonto? Oh, I sent him into town." The Lone Ranger watched Amy return to her kitchen, before turning again to Sam. "I just met a friend of yours, Sam—Gil Ryan."

"Gil Ryan!" The Marshal stiffened.

"He's out, Sam, and he's gunning for you."

Sam picked up his fork and stabbed into the hotcakes which his wife had placed in front of him. "Reckon

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I can still handle riff-raff like Gil Ryan. Thanks for the tip, anyway." Seeing the Lone Ranger's eyes fixed on his hand, Sam dropped the fork and slid his hand under the table. "Old lady sure looks fine, doesn't she?" went on the Marshal in an attempt to distract the masked man's attention.

At that there was a knock at the door, causing Amy to stiffen in alarm. Then she relaxed. "Reckon Gil Ryan won't knock when he comes," she said, going to open the door.

It was Tonto. After greeting the Marshal and his wife, he turned to the Lone Ranger. "Gil Ryan not in town, Kemo Sabay. But much trouble at Joe's place. Boy with whip . . ."

"With a whip!" exclaimed Sam, getting to his feet. "That'll be Slim's boy, Tom. You remember Slim, Ranger—Slim Bartlett?"

"Doctor, wasn't he?"

"That's it. Till some hooligan killed him. Fine man—gentle as they come." The Marshal took his gun-belt from a peg near the door. "Young Tom says his father got killed 'cause he was too soft—let people push him around. Not Tom, though! He's the toughest hombre in town—least that's what he's tryin' to prove. Ain't really bad, though, just runnin' with the wrong crowd."

The Lone Ranger watched uneasily as Amy fussed around her husband, buckling on his gun-belt. There was something odd about Sam Masters, but what it was he couldn't make out.

"Take care, Sam," said the woman

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anxiously as she opened the door for her husband.

Sam grinned as he put on his hat and went outside. "Don't you fret, now, I'll be right back."

As Sam Masters' footsteps died away down the street, the Lone Ranger went over to the woman and stood looking down at her. "What'$ wrong with Sam, Amy?" he asked gently. "Tell me. . . ."

The woman paused before leading the masked man across to the table. "Take a look at his plate. Not a bite touched since you came in. Didn't even finish his coffee. He was too proud to let you see. . . ."

"See what?" asked the Lone Ranger. "I did sense something . . ."

"His hands," replied Amy, "his poor old hands. So crippled with rheumatic he can hardly lift a cup, much less draw a fast gun!"

"Who knows about this?" said the Lone Ranger, suddenly deadly serious.

"Just him and me, I hope. He hasn't drawn a gun in years—hasn't had to. His reputation is enough to carry him through. He's running a big bluff—but some day somebody's going to call him. Gil Ryan, may-be____"

The masked man turned to his Indian friend. "Follow him, Tonto. Don't let him out of your sight! I'll be right down behind you as soon as I change. Gil Ryan might be in town, and I don't want him to recognise me."

"Me understand, Kemo Sabay," said Tonto, hurrying to the door.

"And now, Amy, if you'll just

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show me where Sam hangs his old clothes. . . ."

When Sam Masters pushed open the door of Joe's place, a curious sight met his eyes. It was a combination restaurant and bar, and in one corner, near an old pot-bellied stove, a flashily-dressed man danced up and down as a long black snake whip cracked round his feet.

The young man wielding the whip was angry. "Dance, y' coyote, dance!" he was crying. "Think because my paw was soft, I'm soft, too? Think you can push me around like you could my paw?" The whip cracked and the man in the corner hopped.

"Tom!" Sam Masters spoke from the doorway.

The young man wheeled, but when he saw who it was, the hand holding the whip fell to his side. "Tried to cheat me at cards, Sam." He pointed towards the man in the corner.

Sam nodded. "You've learned him his lesson, Tom. Go on home now," he said quietly.

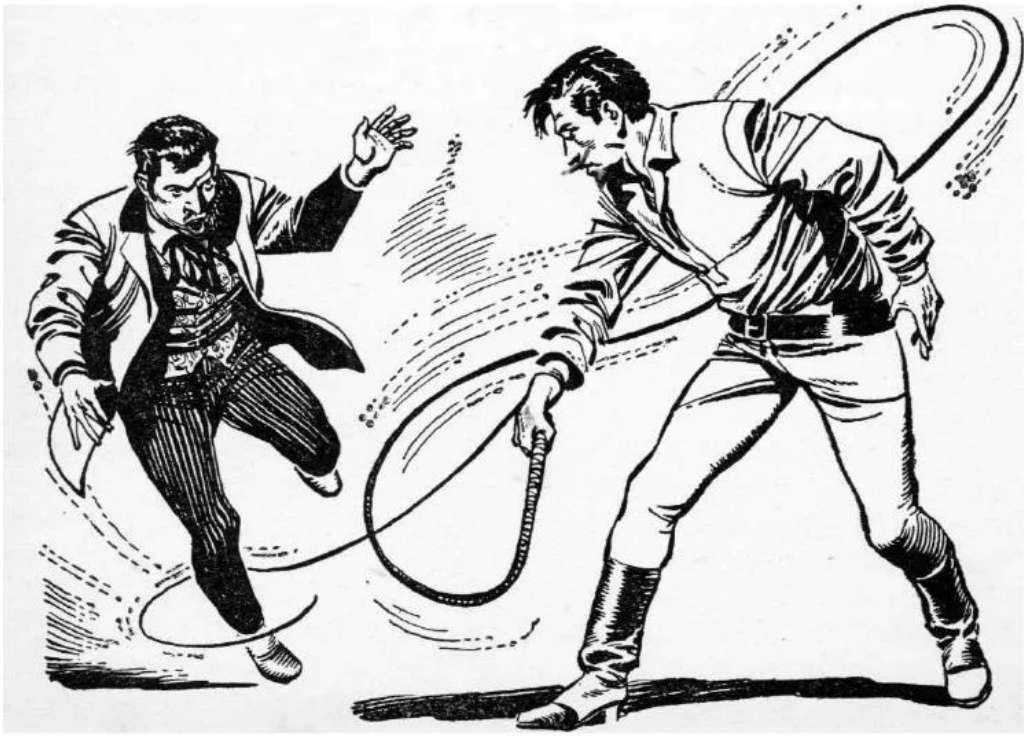
Tom glared once more at his victim, and began coiling the whip round his waist as a tough-looking little man slouched up to him.

" Come on, kid," said the small man, jerking a thumb towards the door.

Sam Masters held up a hand. "Kinda hard up for friends, aren't you, Tom?"

"Meanin' what?" demanded the small man, glaring at Sam.

"Meanin' it's a sad day when Slim's boy has to look to skunks for his friends," replied Sam evenly. "And don't try it, Luke," he added, as he saw the little man's hand sliding down towards his gun. "I



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can draw seven times to your one—and you know it!"

There was a breathless pause as his eyes challenged Luke's. Then the spell was suddenly broken as Tom and Luke headed for the door. Outside, they went over to the rail to unhitch their horses, neither noticing Tonto bending over Scout's hoof, pretending to take out a stone.

"Let's get on to my place," said Luke. "I'm expectin' Gil Ryan any day now."

The two men rode off, and a dirty looking Mexican with a black patch over one eye slid up to Tonto. "You'll find Silver behind the Marshal's office," whispered the Mexican. "Seen Ryan?"

"No, Kemo Sabay," answered Tonto, "but me hear man say he expect him. Him just ride off." The Indian indicated the direction with a slight nod of his head.

"I'll find him," said the disguised Lone Ranger. "I *have* to find Gil Ryan—before he finds Sam!"

Soon after this, Tom and Luke dismounted in front of a small cabin in the mountains not far from Dark Canyon. Luke kicked the door open and they went inside . . .

"Reach!"

The two men jumped as Gil Ryan stepped out from behind the door, holstering his gun and laughing. "Scare you, Luke?"

"Well, you took me awful sudden, Gil," replied the little man, with a relieved look on his face. "This is Tom Bartlett—Gil Ryan."

Gil nodded curtly to the young man. "Look, kid—you ain't seen me. Never heard of me. Is that clear?"

"Yes . . . yes, sir," nodded an awed Tom.

"Tom's okay, Gil," smiled Luke. "Sure glad to see you back. Me and the boys got plans, Gil—big plans!"

"They can wait," growled Gil. "I got me a plan I been waitin' eight years to carry out. . . ."

"Sure, Gil, sure," interrupted Luke, "but listen to this. It's the gold refinery, Gil. Good for fifty thousand at least—and it's so easy!"

A tap at the door caused the three men to jump. Gil Ryan's gun leapt into his hand and he pointed at Tom and then at the door.

Tom went across and jerked it open, to reveal a dirty Mexican with a black patch over one eye.

"Buenos dias, amigos," said the Mexican with a servile bow.

"What do you want?" demanded Tom.

The Mexican smiled and tapped his ears to indicate that he was deaf. "Ase mucho tenia hambre! Dame algo de comer—por favor."

"He's hungry—wants grub," translated Tom.

"Tell him to vamoose," growled Luke.

"Wait!" cried Gil Ryan. "What's your name, Mex?"

Again the bewildered Mexican touched his ears and appealed to Tom, "Soy sordo. No oigo nada."

"He says he's stone deaf," said Tom.

Ryan was looking thoughtfully at the Mexican. "Is he? I wonder—

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his voice rings a bell—like I heard it only recently. Let's see . . ." He waved the Mexican in and shut the door.

As the Mexican moved into the room, taking off his hat and bowing, Gil Ryan whispered through tight lips, "Move round behind him, Luke. Quiet . . . very quiet. Tom, you keep his attention. Get a skillet and find out if he can cook."

Tom stepped over to the stove, unhooked a pan, and set it on the table. Then he tapped the Mexican on the chest and pointed to the pan, making motions of stirring and adding salt. At this the Mexican brightened at once, assuring Tom that he was the greatest cook in the world.

Meanwhile, Luke had crept up behind the stranger.

"Okay, Luke," said Gil Ryan. "Take out your gun and lift it over his head."

As Luke grinned and raised his gun-butt, the Mexican went on talking to Tom, giving no sign that he knew his head might be split open the next moment.

"When I say 'Go', hit him—hard." Gil was watching the Mexican's face closely.

Still the Mexican went on explaining what a wonderful cook he was, while Luke stood, gun raised, itching to bring it down. Not by so much as a flicker of an eye did the Lone Ranger betray the fact that he was conscious of his peril.

"Okay, he's on the level," said Gil Ryan at last. "He's just what we need around here—a cook who can't hear a word. Kid, tell him to rustle up some grub."

Tom tapped the Mexican on the shoulder and nodded, smiling. At once the stranger was all gratitude, wringing Tom's hands before going over to the food cupboard and taking out flour and cooking utensils.

"What's all this about stickin' up the gold refinery?" asked Gil Ryan. . . .

A few days later, the Lone Ranger, now in his own clothes, and Tonto were in Sam Masters' house. Tonto was helping Amy to lay the table for a meal.

"Hope you gave them varmints the worst case of indigestion they ever had!" laughed Sam.

The Lone Ranger smiled. "I think the indigestion comes later, Sam."

"When they raid the refinery in the morning—and find us there waiting for them!" said Sam eagerly.

The masked man rose and put a hand on Sam's shoulder. "Better let Tonto and me take care of the ambush, Sam. Amy told us about your hands."

"Meaning you think I'm too old to be any use—is that it?" Sam looked down at his crippled knuckles.

"Not at all, Sam," said the Lone Ranger reassuringly. "You're the key man in this operation. That's why you should stay in town—right in front of your office—where everyone can see you. That way they won't suspect what we're up to at the refinery."

Sam nodded miserably. "Maybe

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you're right. But I sure wish young Tom wasn't mixed up in this. . .

"Don't worry about Slim's boy, Sam," said the masked man. "I'll keep him out of this—I promise. Just let me have the keys to your office."

That night, as Tom Bartlett walked down the deserted main street of Dark Canyon, he suddenly found his way barred by Tonto. The Indian placed a finger to his lips. "Gil Ryan—him say come quick!"

"Ryan? What's he want?" demanded Tom, peering suspiciously at the Indian.

" Him in plenty trouble—want you! Come!" breathed Tonto urgently.

Puzzled, Tom set off after Tonto, down a narrow alleyway that led along the side of the Marshal's office. When they came to a door that opened into the back room of the office, Tonto paused, looked around him, and went inside, beckoning Tom to follow. The young man's hand went instinctively to the handle of the whip coiled round his waist, but he went in after the Indian—to find himself face to face with the Lone Ranger, a gun in his hand.

"Sorry, Tom, but this happens to be necessary," apologised the masked man. "Get his whip, Tonto."

Tom was staring, open-mouthed, unable to understand what was happening to him. "Who—who arc you? Where's Gil? What's the idea?"

The Lone Ranger prodded the young man towards the cell. "Who am I?" The cell door was shut and

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locked. "Le gusta tacos, Senor? Frijoles? Mm-mm!"

"You! The Mexican!" yelled Tom. "Of all the low-down tricks! You spied on us, you double-crossing outlaw!"

The Lone Ranger took the whip from Tonto, coiled it carefully and hung it on a peg. "I'm no outlaw, Tom, and you're being locked up for your own good. One night in jail is better than ten years there. Think it over, and you'll find you're on the same side of the law as Sam and I—the only side that Slim's boy ever should be on."

With that, the Lone Ranger and Tonto went outside, leaving Tom shaking the bars of the cell in his fury. For some time he stood there staring at the door through which the masked man and the Indian had gone. Then his eyes caught the coiled whip hanging on its peg not far from the bars of his cell. Reaching out as far as he could, he found that his fingers were a good twelve inches short of the down-hanging stock of the whip. He pulled his arm in, baffled for the moment. Then he had an idea. Pulling off one of his boots, he reached out with it and found he was just able to touch the stock and set it swinging. He tapped it again and the arc of its swing increased. Then, dropping the boot to the floor, Tom reached out, grabbed the stock as it came towards him, and pulled the long whip off its peg. This accomplished, he sat down to wait.. ..

Tom must have fallen asleep. When he opened his eyes and sat up with a jerk, it was morning and there was someone moving outside his cell. It was Lafe Bittner, Sam's jailer, and he was filling the lamp on the desk from a small spout-nosed oil-can. The keys were hanging from his belt.

"'Morning, Lafe," said Tom pleasantly, going over to the bars. "Sam Masters here?"

"He's sittin' out in the sun," replied Lafe without looking up.

Tom watched the jailer for a few moments before picking up his whip and shaking it out quietly through the bars. Then, judging the distance with an expert eye, he flicked the whip so that it coiled round Lafe's neck, and before the luckless jailer realised what was happening he was being hauled backwards towards the cell door. In a flash, Tom had reached through the bars, taken the key from the jailer's belt, unlocked the cell door and stepped outside. He then pushed Lafe into the cell and locked the door once more. . . .

Meanwhile, the Lone Ranger and Tonto were crouching behind an ore truck outside the Dark Canyon gold refinery. Behind another truck they could make out three other figures—Sam Masters' deputies.

"Here they come, Tonto!" The Lone Ranger signalled to the other t men to keep down as a buckboard clattered up to stop outside the building. Beside it rode Luke Small and two more of Gil Ryan's gang. The outlaws dismounted and made their way into the refinery.

"Something's gone wrong, Tonto!" whispered the masked man. "Gil Ryan isn't with them!"

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A few nerve-racking minutes, and then the gang came backing out, two of them carrying a heavy chest between them. As they came out they fired back into the building to discourage pursuit. The buckboard driver helped to heave the chest on to the wagon. . . .

It was then that the Lone Ranker stood up and fired a shot in the air. "Dro^ your guns!" he shouted as he, Tonto and the deputies closed in on the surprised gang. The outlaws dropped their guns as one man and raised their arms high.

"Where's Gil Ryan?" The Lone Ranger spoke to Luke.

"Ask Sam Masters," growled the little man. "Like as not he's lookin' down Gil's gun barrel right now—if he ain't dead already!"

"Take care of them, Tonto!" shouted the Lone Ranger running towards the hidden Silver. . . .

While these events were taking place at the refinery, Sam Masters was sitting comfortably in the sun outside his office, his chair tipped back against the wall. He was almost dozing off when, suddenly, a figure ran out of the side alley and headed across the street to Joe's place. Sam's chair came forward with a thump as he recognised Tom Bartlett, carrying his coiled whip in his hand!

"Hey, you! Tom! Gome back here!" Sam jumped to his feet and started after the young man as he disappeared into the restaurant.

Gil Ryan was seated at a table near the far end of the room, and as

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Tom burst in the gunman rose slowly and deliberately to his feet. "Well, where have you been?" he barked.

Tom was never able to answer that question, for at that moment Sam Masters loomed in the doorway, paused for a few electric seconds, and took a few paces towards Gil Ryan. Ryan stepped clear of the table to clear his hands for action.

Sam took two more careful steps, his crippled hands hovering over his guns.

"Howdy, Sam," leered Ryan. "I was comin' to pay you a call, but you've saved me the trouble."

"If I'd known where to find you, I'd have come sooner," said Sam evenly. "'Tain't legal for ex-convicts to carry guns in this town—so I'm takin' yours. Hand 'em over."

Ryan's hands crept closer to his gun-butts. "Hold it, Sam!"

Sam advanced another step. "I can outdraw you seven to one, Gil—and you know it."

A thin, cold smile twisted Gil Ryan's lips. "Not any more, you can't. I know about your hands. . . ."

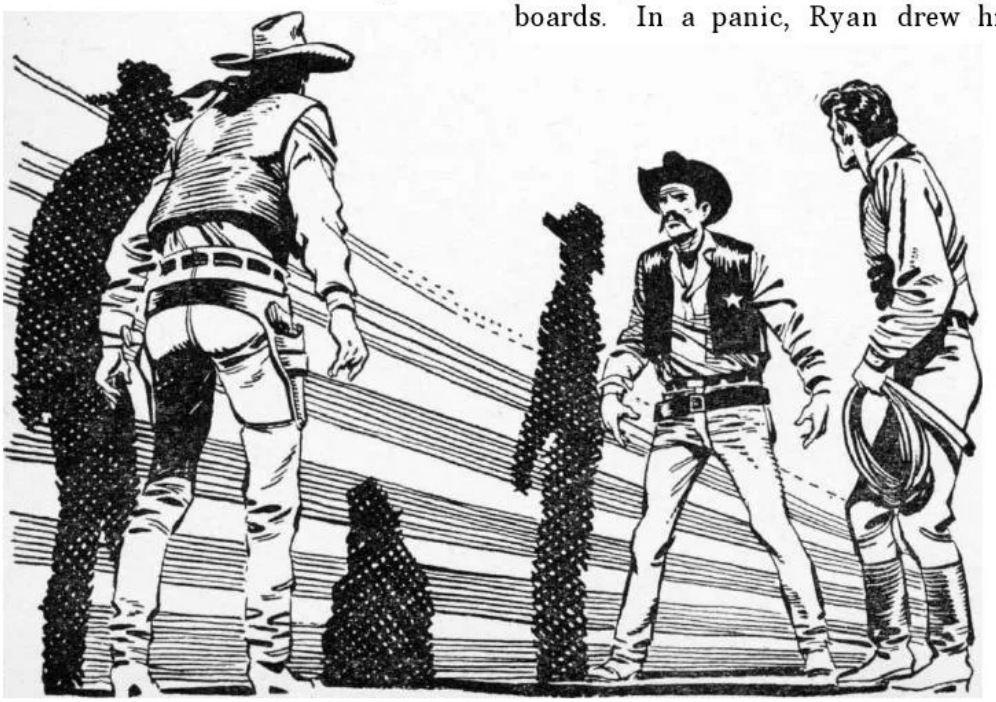
For the first time Sam knew that this was the moment of death, but he showed no outward sign. His voice was still icy cool as he said: "Then why don't you draw?"

"I'll draw when I'm ready," mocked Ryan. "But I want to see you sweat first, like I did—for eight long years! I'll draw at 'eight' . . . One . . . Two . . . Three . . . Four."

Tom stood watching the scene, his eyes wide and fearful.

"Five . . . Six . . . This is the end of the line, Sam," went on Ryan mercilessly. "Seven . . . Eight!"

As Ryan pulled his gun, Tom's whip cracked round the wrist, deflecting the shot into the floorboards. In a panic, Ryan drew his



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other gun, but before he could pull the trigger there was a shot from the doorway and the gun flew from the outlaw's hand.

The Lone Ranger walked into the room, a still-smoking gun in his hand.

"Bring him out, Sam," said the masked man. "His friends are just arriving."

Sam grinned, dragged a pair of handcuffs out of his pocket, and handed them to Tom. "Snap 'em on him, will you, son? My hands aren't what they were."

"I sure will, Sam," said Tom eagerly. "I knew about your hands, Sam. Gil Ryan told us. Reckon today I learned what real courage is, seein' you stand up to that varmint when you knew you were licked."

"Nonsense!" said Sam gruffly. "Me and Amy can go ranchin' now—seein' I got me a man to take my place." Sam was fumbling at the Marshal's badge on his shirt. "Mister," he turned to the Lone Ranger, "if you'll oblige. . . ."

"Certainly, Sam," smiled the masked man, who came over, unpinned the badge from Sam's shirt and stuck it in Tom's.

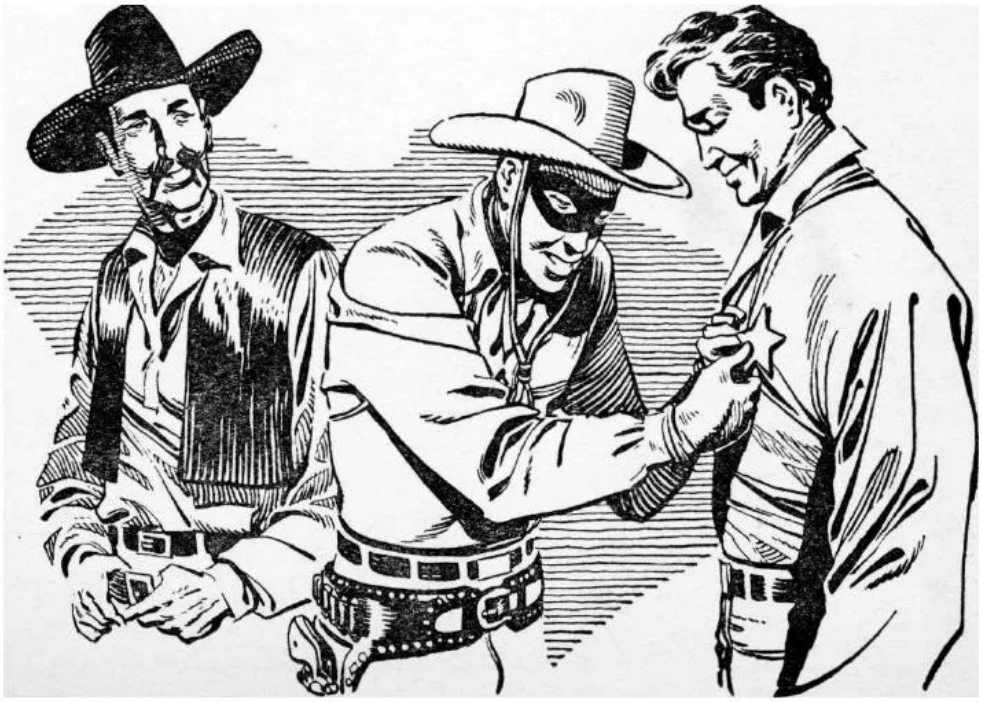
Tom stared down at it in disbelief. "Me?" he gulped.

"You wanted to be tough, Tom," said the Lone Ranger. "Well, now's your chance—on the side of the law."

Sam blinked away a tear. "Your paw'd be mighty proud of you, Tom."

Tom rubbed the badge with his sleeve. "Thanks, Sam, I'll try to be fit for it. . . ." He paused at the sound of hoof beats. "That masked man—who is he?"

"Him?" said Sam Masters. "Just the best friend a man ever had. He's the Lone Ranger!"



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THE COUNTERFEIT MASK

U.S. Deputy Marshal Brad Calloway was worried and sick at heart. For many years the Lone Ranger had been a good friend of his; a man he had admired and respected, a man who never fired a shot except in the cause of law and justice. Then those reports started coming in: Quartzville Bank held up by three men, one wearing a black mask and a white stetson—bank teller shot. Stagecoach held up by three men, one in blue shirt and pants and wearing a black mask—driver shot dead by a silver bullet . . .

There were many more similar reports on the Marshal's desk. It was now clear that the masked man so many people had put their faith in had betrayed them. Marshal Calloway still found it hard to believe, but he had his duty to do—the Lone Ranger had to be brought in, dead or alive!

Calloway took his gun-belt from a peg on the wall and buckled it on . . .

The Lone Ranger and Tonto were sitting on their haunches by a campfire eating beans from tin plates. A smoke-blackened coffee pot steamed merrily.

"We go much out of way just to see old friend, Kemo Sabay," said Tonto after a long pause.

The Lone Ranger smiled. "I haven't seen Brad Calloway for years, Tonto. He's a fine law officer—well

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worth going out of our way to visit."

As the masked man started to pour himself some more coffee, Tonto stiffened and knelt with his ear to the ground.

"Horsemen coming, Kemo Sabay —four, five men."

The Lone Ranger drew a gun and walked easily out on to the wagon road, as four riders came towards him. It was Marshal Brad Calloway and his posse.

"Brad! Brad Calloway!" exclaimed the Lone Ranger, holstering his gun and taking a few steps toward the horsemen.

"Just the man we're looking for," said Calloway coldly. "Hand up your gun-belt!"

The masked man found himself looking into the barrels of three rifles. "I—I don't understand, Brad!" he exclaimed in surprise at the Marshal's welcome.

"There's a lot / don't understand either," said the Marshal. "Hand up that gun-belt before I blow your head off!"

The Lone Ranger unfastened his belt and handed it up.

"Now get on your horse," ordered Calloway. "You too, Injun." He signed to Tonto who was coming up behind. "You're coming with us."

Less than an hour later, the Lone Ranger and Tonto were being ushered into a cell in Quartzville jail.

" I tell you, Brad," the masked man was protesting, "it was another man! Tonto and I haven't been in this part of the country for years. Anyone can get a mask like mine, and this wouldn't

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be the first time I've been impersonated."

"I've already thought of that," said Calloway, pushing the two men into the cell and slamming the door. "I've never seen the Lone Ranger's face. I have only the voice to go on, and of that I can't be sure. Even if there are two masked men—one the Lone Ranger whom I've admired and respected for years, the other a thieving, murderous fraud—*which one are you?"*

The Marshal turned the key in the lock and went out, followed by his men.

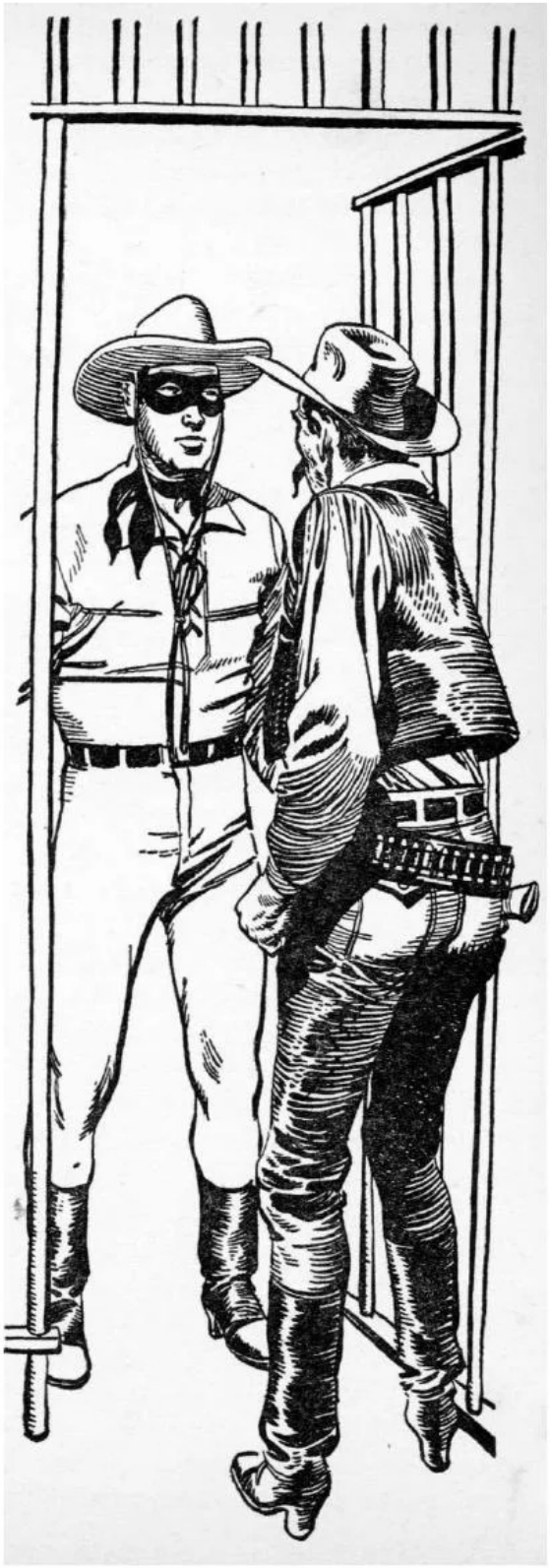
It was almost sunset when the outer door of the Marshal's office opened and the jailor, Bob Hardy, came over to look through the bars at the two prisoners.

"Don't think you remember me, Ranger," half-whispered the old man, "but I remember *you,* even though it's been a pile o' years. Remember your voice, too—won't never forget it."

"Bob Hardy!" said the Lone Ranger softly, his face lighting up with recognition.

"That's right—Bob Hardy—and the last time you saw me I was sittin' on a horse wrong way round, with a rope round my neck. And if you and your Injun friend hadn't come along I'd o' been danglin' from that tree for somethin' I hadn't done."

As he spoke, the old man unlocked the cell door and swung it open. "Your guns are right over there on the table, and your horses are out back. All I ask is that you kinda hit



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me over the head—not too hard o* course—and tie me up to make it look good. Okay?"

The Lone Ranger stood at the open cell door, making no attempt to come out. "Close the door, Bob," he said quietly.

"Close the door?" echoed an astonished Bob.

The Lone Ranger himself pulled the cell door shut. "I appreciate what you're trying to do, but this isn't the way to do it. You see, Bob, jail-breaking is law-breaking. Tonto and I ride with the law, not against it."

The old man looked at the Lone Ranger curiously, then his face broke into a broad smile, and he turned towards the far door. "Marshal!" he called out. "You can come in now."

The door was thrown open and in stalked Marshal Calloway. He went straight over and took the Lone Ranger by the hand. "All right, I'm convinced," he said. "Nobody but the real Lone Ranger would be so stiff-necked and law-abiding as to turn down a chance to escape. You're the Ranger, all right—and my old friend!"

The Lone Ranger grasped the Marshal's hand warmly.

"You're free to go," went on Calloway, "but I expect you back—with the killer."

The masked man smiled. "We'll do our best. I'll need my guns, some different clothes." He paused to think. "A couple of mules, and about five hundred pounds of high-grade gold ore. Can you manage it?"

The Marshal raised his eyebrows in surprise, but nodded gravely. "I'll manage it."

"The masked man seems to strike wherever there's loot to be had. I think if he hears that a couple of sourdoughs have just struck it rich, we can expect him to pay us a call."

The Lone Ranger buckled on his gun-belt.

Next morning, the Lone Ranger, dressed as an old grizzled prospector, led a mule up the mountain road away from Quartzville. His face was heavily bearded and the brim of his sweat-stained hat turned up at the front. By the Lone Ranger's side walked Tonto, also dirty and unkempt, and he also led a mule on which were loaded sacks of gold ore.

"There's a stamp mill up the canyon, Tonto. We'll take our ore there to be refined. It's the best place to advertise our gold strike. . . . What's this?"

A large mongrel dog bounded out of the undergrowth at the edge of the road and began prancing around and barking as though trying to attract the attention of the two men. Crying pitifully, he kept darting to the edge of the road where it dropped off into a canyon, and looking round to see if the men were following.

The Lone Ranger went over to the edge and looked down.

Below lay a wagon, smashed and overturned. The wagon-mules had broken loose. Beside the wagon lay a man—obviously dead.

The Lone Ranger climbed down

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and stood over the dead man, patting the dog to soothe him. "Is it your master, boy?" The dog responded with a plaintive squeal.

Carefully, the Lone Ranger went through the man's pockets.

"Looks like an accident, Tonto," he said after a few moments, "only it isn't. He's been shot through the heart. Nothing on him—no valuables. Looks like robbery."

Tonto went over to have a look at the wrecked wagon. Suddenly his eye caught something glinting in the sunlight, and drawing his knife he began to dig the shining object out of the wood . . .

"Silver bullet, Kemo Sabay!" said Tonto grimly.

The Lone Ranger came over to take the bullet from Tonto's hand. "My double plays his role well, Tonto; right down to the smallest detail."

The dog had now returned to the road and was once more barking and darting about as though trying to get the men to follow him.

"He's trying to tell us something. Wants us to follow him," suggested the Lone Ranger, scrambling up the bank towards the dog.

The dog led the two men to a crude mining shack, in front of which stood a boy of about fourteen, his clothes old and patched. The dog bounded up to the boy and jumped up at him excitedly.

"What you doin' here, Buck? Thought you were with Paw," the boy spoke to the dog.

"That your dog, son?" asked the Lone Ranger kindly.

"Sure is," replied the boy.

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"Thought he went down to the stamp mill with Paw. Guess he didn't, though. My name's Joe Wilkins."

"I'm Ed Dorrity," said the Lone Ranger, holding out his hand. "This here's my friend, Grey Horse." He indicated Tonto. "You said your Paw went to the stamp mill. Was he drivin' a buckboard with a span o' mules?"

Joe frowned. "Yes. He was goin' to pick up some gold that they'd refined for us at the mill, then go into town. Why?"

The Lone Ranger looked serious. "I'm afraid I got some bad news for you, son. Your Paw's dead. We found his wagon in a ravine. He's been shot, Joe."

"You sure it was Paw?" asked the boy, his voice breaking.

The Lone Ranger nodded. "The dog was standing over his body."

Joe passed his hand over his face, then turned and ran towards the shack, shouting, "Maw! Maw!"

"Tonto . . ." The Lone Ranger's face was tight with rage. "I'll bring this masked murderer to justice if it's the last act of my life!"

Still dressed as prospectors, the Lone Ranger and Tonto made their way up to the gold refinery, a rough frame building with a sign: QUARTZ CREEK STAMP MILL over the door. Outside a tough looking character was unloading ore from a mine wagon.

"Howdy, Mister!" greeted the Lone Ranger. "Can you run some ore through yer mill fer us?"

The man looked the prospectors up and down before replying. "Reckon

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so. You're strangers round here, aren't you?"

"Not fer long we won't be, son!" cackled the Lone Ranger. "Reckon as soon as the news gets round o' the strike we made we won't be strangers to nobody!" He fished a piece of ore out of one of the sacks. "Feast your eyes on that, son!"

The man glanced at the chunk of ore. "Where'd you get this?"

"Right up there in our diggins at Little Spring Greek, son!" bubbled the Lone Ranger. "Biggest vein o' gold you ever laid eyes on, son."

"The Miggins claim, eh?" said the man, trying not to show his excitement. "Put your ore on the scale and mosey along. I'll take care of it later."

Picking up a lump of ore, the man went into the mill and knocked on the door of an inner office.

"It's Blade! Let me in!" he half-whispered.

The door was unlocked and Blade went inside.

" Keller! Look at this!" he handed the ore to a man seated behind a desk—a masked man dressed exactly as the Lone Ranger. "An old coot out there just brought in two mule-loads of this stuff. Look at the colour of it! Says he reopened the old Miggins claim up on Silver Spring!"

Keller took the ore and examined it closely. "The Miggins claim? You idiot! No wonder I've to tell you every move to make!" The masked man shook the ore in Blade's face. "Look at the formation in that quartz! Any fool ought to know it never came from anywhere around here! The only place you find agate and quartz together is way over at Sunset Ridge—forty miles from here!"

"But—he told me it came from the Miggins claim."

"Then he was lying. He could have lied because he wanted to keep his diggings secret. Or it could be a trap, laid for us by that stupid Marshal, Brad Calloway." He turned to two other men in the office. "Jay, you and Duke follow that prospector. See where he goes and what he's up to.

Keller pulled off his hat and mask. "If it *is* a trap, I think it's time *this* Lone Ranger disappeared for a while." He started to remove his shirt . . .

Keller's henchmen, Jay and Duke, soon found the trail of the two prospectors and followed it to a camp site at the entrance to a mine tunnel. The Lone Ranger and Tonto barely had time to change into their normal clothes before Jay and Duke appeared on the scene, only to find themselves looking into the wrong end of the Lone Ranger's guns as he stepped from the mine tunnel,

t "Boss! How did you get here first?" exclaimed Jay in an injured tone.

"Boss, eh?" echoed the Lone Ranger, advancing on the two gunmen. "Take them down to the camp, Tonto, there are a few questions they have to answer. And you'd better tell them I'm not their boss and that I

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am the old prospector who brought in the ore today."

"Reckon you had *me* fooled too, Mister. Drop those guns!" The voice came from behind the Lone Ranger and Tonto—from the boy, Joe Wilkins, who stepped out from behind some bushes, a rifle aimed at the masked man.

"You don't understand, Joe!" began the Lone Ranger, half turning.

"Drop 'em!" As the Lone Ranger and Tonto dropped their weapons, Joe went on: "I understand plenty. When I went to town and found that the Marshal had let you go, I knew the whole thing. You killed my Paw! That's all I need to understand."

Jay and Duke, overjoyed at the sudden change in the situation, backed away to enjoy the scene from a safe distance.

"Will you listen to me for five minutes, Joe?" asked the masked man.

"I'm listenin', Mister."

The Lone Ranger began to explain exactly how and why he and Tonto had discovered Joe's father and the crashed wagon. When he had finished, the boy with the rifle looked rather less sure of himself.

"You mean A1 Keller, the owner of the stamp mill is the masked man?"

"I'm sure of it, Joe."

"How do I know whether to believe you. I came here to kill you . . ."

At that a horseman rode up and dismounted. It was Keller himself, now dressed in an ordinary outfit.

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"Good work, Joe!" cried the stamp mill owner. "You can put your rifle away now. We'll take care of these two."

The boy looked puzzled. "What you doin' here, Mr. Keller?"

"Keller!" exclaimed the Lone Ranger. "His name's Rankin and he's an outlaw I helped to jail in Montana a few years ago!"

Keller smiled cruelly. "And when you did, I swore I'd get even with you. You're going to die now—hated throughout the length and breadth of the West!"

"No you don't!" cried Joe, raising his rifle to aim it at Keller; but before he could get it up, a bullet hit him in the shoulder and he staggered back toward Tonto, who supported him.

"Jay—Duke!" cried Keller, waving a smoking gun, "take them into the mine and tie them up—but not too tight," he added in Jay's ear.

"Okay." Jay took a length of rope and, gun in hand, waved the two men and the boy into the mine. Duke lit a pitch pine torch from the campfire and followed them in.

When they were some distance inside the mine tunnel, the gunmen made their prisoners lie down and they were tied, hand and foot—but not too tightly, as Keller had ordered.

Meanwhile, Keller was busy. He had noticed a box of dynamite outside the mine entrance, and this he carried into the tunnel with the help of the fourth member of the gang, Blade, who had just arrived on the scene. They placed the box against one wall of the tunnel. Then, as

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Blade held a torch, Keller got busy on the box.

"It's got to look like an accident," explained the gang leader. "There's an old trick that miners used to use to keep their claims from being robbed. I think we can put it to use . . ." He produced some fish-line from his pocket, cut three lengths of it, and attached one end of each length to a crude trigger mechanism inside the box of dynamite. From a hole in the box, he then carefully led out the three lines and attached them a few feet apart to the opposite wall of the tunnel so that they were a bare four inches from the floor.

He had hardly finished his task, when Jay and Duke came trudging out, having secured the prisoners.

"Watch the trip-lines!" breathed Keller. "One pull and they'll blow this place sky-high!"

Holding their torch close to the ground Jay and Duke stepped gingerly over each of the three trip-lines.

"You left the ropes loose on them?" asked Keller as the four men made their way out into the open.

"Like you said," growled Jay.

Back inside the mine, the Lone Ranger and Tonto were squirming and heaving, trying to free themselves. The boy lay still, weak from his wound.

"Rope not tight, Kemo Sabay," grunted Tonto. "Hands come loose. There!"

His hands free, Tonto sat up and untied the Lone Ranger's bonds. The masked man then felt for the boy

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in the pitch-darkness and started on his ropes. "Funny those bonds were so loose," mused the Lone Ranger. "Granny knots, too. You'd think a man accustomed to tying packs on the mule would know how to tie a proper knot."

"I sure made a mistake about you two," apologised Joe as the last rope was pulled free.

"An understandable mistake, Joe," replied the masked man. "But I'm worried about those bonds. Do you suppose they *meant* us to get free?"

"But why, Kemo Sabay?"

"I don't know yet." The Lone Ranger started to help Joe out along the tunnel. . .

Carefully the three groped their way forward, Tonto leading, until they came to the first of the trip-lines. The Indian's moccasined foot came down on a piece of ore, and Tonto bent down to feel what he had stepped on. In so doing, his hand touched the trip-line . . .

"Kemo Sabay!"

The Lone Ranger came up beside his friend and struck a match. "So that's it! A rig to blow us up!" He held the lighted match under the trip-line, which caught fire and parted. "That's only one. There may be more, Tonto."

On their guard now, the two men inched their way forward, lighting matches and looking for further cords.

"There's another one!" The Lone Ranger carefully parted the second trip-line. "There may be still another . . ."

As they continued their search, a voice echoed from the mouth of the tunnel. "Find Joe, Buck!" It was the voice of Marshal Calloway!

"It's my dog, Buck!" cried Joe. "Stay, Buck! Stay!"

By the light of one of the Lone Ranger's matches they could see the big dog come bounding along the tunnel . . .

"Stay, Buck! *Stay, Boy!"*

The dog stopped, whimpering, and flopped down on his belly.

"Don't let the dog move, Joe!" breathed the Lone Ranger, lighting another match and searching desperately for the third cord he was sure there was.

There were footsteps in the tunnel and the Marshal's voice calling out, "Find Joe, Buck! Find him, Boy!"

The dog began to creep forward on its stomach . . .

"Stay, Boy/" ordered Joe desperately.

The dog lay still once more, and at that moment the masked man found the third trip-line and held a match to it. It flared up and parted.

The Marshal appeared round a bend in the tunnel, carrying a torch.

"Easy, Marshal," warned the Lone Ranger. "Keller tried to blow us up. There may be another trip-line abound here."

By the light of Calloway's torch they soon discovered that there were in fact no more cords, and the little party made their way out of the mine into the blinding sunlight, Tonto supporting Joe, the Lone Ranger carefully carrying the box of dynamite.

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"Keller's your man, Marshal," said the boy. "I know the whole thing now . . ."

But even as the boy spoke, Keller himself stepped out from behind a rock, gun in hand, followed at once by the rest of his gang.

"Now you can all trot back into that mine!" He waved his gun. "Go on! Get back!"

The Lone Ranger took a step forward and held up the box of dynamite. "Go ahead and shoot, Keller. If I drop this, we'll all be blown to bits!"

Keller backed away a few paces. "You crazy fool!" he yelled.

"Drop your guns!" ordered the masked man.

Blade, Jay and Duke obeyed at once, but not Keller. His face stiff with fear, he backed against a rock.

The Lone Ranger lifted the box over his head. "Drop it, Keller!"

His eyes wide with terror, Keller let his gun fall to the ground.

Marshal Galloway picked up the dropped guns, the Lone Ranger gently lowered the dynamite to earth.

"Takes more than a counterfeit mask to impersonate the Lone Ranger," grinned the Marshal, clapping handcuffs on Keller's wrists. "And what it takes, you haven't got!"

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A QUESTION OF TIME

"Hear that, Tonto?" The Lone Ranger reined Silver to a sudden stop and turned his head to listen.

"Sound like many guns, Kemo Sabay." Tonto's brow furrowed as he tried to place the peculiar cracking noise.

"It could be something else . . . Tonto! Look there!" The masked man had ridden to the edge of the precipitous mountain trail they had been following. He was pointing a gloved hand to where the mountain road wound like a narrow ribbon far below them. "Looks like trouble, Tonto. It's a runaway team! Come on!"

Together the two men swung their horses down the steep slope. Skidding and sliding, the Lone Ranger and Tonto clattered down until they reached more level ground, then they were off at a gallop after the runaway.

As they drew nearer they saw that it was a two-horse buckboard wagon. Half-standing in front of the driver's seat was an elderly man, heaving and sawing with all his might on the reins. Beside him, clinging in terror to the seat, was a woman.

The cracking and banging noise which had first drawn the masked man's attention to the runaway grew louder as he approached the buckboard.

A few more long strides from Silver and the Lone Ranger drew level

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with the frightened horses. Rising in his stirrups the masked man steadied himself for a moment, then, with a flying leap, he landed on the back of the nearest runaway. As Tonto came up to grab the bridle of the other horse, the Lone Ranger was already easing the team to a stop. The cracking, which had been coming from the back of the buckboard, had stopped.

"There now, Kate, it's all right," the old man soothed his wife. "Thanks to these two. . . ." He stopped short when he noticed the Lone Ranger's mask. "A hold-up, eh? Look, Mister, all I got on me is three dollars. . . ."

"Believe me, sir, I'm not a bandit," smiled the Lone Ranger, handing up the reins to the old man. He touched his hat to the woman. "I hope *you're* not afraid of me, ma'am."

The woman hesitated, studying the masked man closely. "Well—you did save our lives. . . ."

"Yeah, that's right," added her husband reluctantly.

"What made the team bolt—firecrackers?" asked the masked man.

"Why, yes! How'd you know?"

The Lone Ranger smiled. "It's Independence Day."

"It sure is," agreed the man on the buckboard, "and they're havin' a big rodeo back a piece. The whole town o' Flat Rock's out there celebratin'." He leaned back and picked up some fragments of the burned-out firecrackers from the bed of the buck-

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board. "Reckon somebody must have tossed these in as we drove by." The old man shook the reins. "Well, if it's all the same to you, we'll be gettin' along. I got me a watch to pick up at the clockmaker's. Kate, here, gave it to me on our first weddin' anniversary, nigh forty years ago. We're all-fired grateful to you, stranger."

"Don't mention it, Mister . . ."

"Ellsworth," said the old man. "Tom Ellsworth. Well, 'bye—and thanks again." He slapped the reins and the buckboard creaked off down the trail towards town.

Half an hour later, when Tom Ellsworth drove his buckboard up the dusty main street of the little town, the whole place was deserted. A streamer stretched right across the street proclaiming in large letters: RODEO—9 MILES SOUTH-COME ONE—COME ALL!

Although there was no sign of life in the street, there was feverish activity behind the shuttered front of a shop with a sign reading: JOE BENSON — CLOCKS AND WATCHES. In the shop there were three 'men—Joe Benson himself, a fat, shifty-eyed character, and the Grody brothers, Steve and Luke, outlaws and killers both.

Joe Benson was passing a small black valise over the counter to Steve Grody when the sound of Tom Ellsworth's cart pulling up outside made the three men pause to listen.

"Who's that?" hissed Steve Grody in a tense whisper.

Benson slipped round the counter to peer through the front-door blind.

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"Customer of mine. He's come for his watch."

Steve Grody grabbed up the valise. "Well, give it to him!"

"But I can't, Steve," wheezed Benson. "It ain't fixed yet!"

"Give it to him, I tell you, and get rid of him quick, or I will!" He gave Benson a push towards the door, then he and his brother slipped through a curtained doorway leading to a back room.

"Hello, there! Anybody in?" came Tom's voice from outside.

Benson pulled himself together and started to unlock the door. "Just a minute!"

When the door was opened, a beaming Tom Ellsworth and his wife walked into the shop. "We were a-feared you might be off to the rodeo," said the old man.

"Only man in town that ain't," said Joe Benson with an air of mock cheerfulness. "Never disappoint a customer—that's my motto." He glanced uneasily towards the back room as he went behind the counter and took a leather-fobbed watch from a peg on the wall. "She's runnin' good as new. Let's see now—I'll set her to the exact time."

Benson went through the motions of setting the watch, comparing it to one he had taken from his own pocket. "Mainspring was busted, that's what it was. Over-windin'. I'll wrap her up for you." He reached out for a sheet of paper.

"Never mind, I'll just wear it," beamed the old man, holding out his hand.

"Sure, sure. There y'are." Benson handed the watch to the old-timer, who took three silver dollars from his pocket and slapped them on the counter. "Three dollars even, and thank you kindly, sir. I'll open the door for you." Benson let out a long sigh of relief as Tom pocketed the watch and went outside. "Hope you have a nice ride home," he called as the couple climbed on to their buckboard and drove off.

The wagon was just leaving the far end of the town when Tom Ellsworth eased his horses to a walk, peered up at the sun, and took the watch from his pocket. "This watch still ain't runnin'," complained the old man, holding it to his ear. "Not a tick out of it."

"Maybe if you shake it a little," suggested his wife.

Tom did so, listened again and shook his head. "It's just plumb stopped. Durned if I'm payin' out three dollars for nothing." He stuffed the watch back into his pocket, wheeled his horses in a sharp turn, and set off back through the town . . .

As the buckboard approached Joe Benson's shop once more, there was no one to be seen anywhere. The whole town seemed completely deserted. Then, suddenly, it happened . . . A heavy explosion rattled the wooden buildings all along the street. The door of the Western Express Office opposite Benson's shop swung open. A thick cloud of smoke billowed out through the door. With the smoke came two men, Steve and Luke Grody. As they ran across the

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street towards the watchmaker's shop, old Tom saw that Steve Grody carried a black valise crammed to the brim with small sacks of gold-dust.

"Glory be!" he cried, pushing his wife down to the floor of the buckboard. "They've blowed up the express office!"

Frantically the old man turned his frightened team.

"It's that old guy!" pointed Luke Grody. "He's got us spotted!"

The two brothers whipped out their guns and began firing after the retreating buckboard. One of the shots found its target and Tom Ellsworth slumped to the bed of the wagon. The driverless, maddened team went racing down the deserted street. . .

But the shooting had not gone entirely unnoticed. The Lone^Ranger and Tonto, who had been making camp on the outskirts of the town, had heard the shots. They lost no time in getting into the saddle. . . .

When the masked man and the Indian found the buckboard it was canted up against a roadside tree. The blown team stood quietly, while Kate hovered weeping over her unconscious husband.

"They shot him—they shot my Tom—please help him!" cried the woman tearfully as the Lone Ranger dismounted and came running up to bend over the fallen man.

"Who did it, ma'am?" asked the masked man without looking up.

"Two men. I didn't get to see them very clear. They were robbing the express office."

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The Lone Ranger and Tonto exchanged quick glances.

"Try not to worry, ma'am," said the masked man. "The bullet only creased his skull. . . ."

"But him need doctor, Kemo Sabay."

"Yes, and quickly." The Lone Ranger turned to the woman. "Tonto will bring you and your husband into town. I'll ride on ahead."

Meanwhile, back in Joe Benson's shop, the three men had just finished weighing out the sacks of gold-dust into three equal lots. The Grody brothers stuffed their portions into saddlebags. Benson's went into a small safe behind the counter.

"Let's hit the road," grunted Steve Grody to his brother.

Luke nodded. "Right now. Got your story straight, Joe?"

Benson shut the safe door. "Sure. I don't see a thing! I heard the explosion—then the shootin'. And I ducked under the counter here."

"That's it," grinned Steve. "Okay, Luke." The two men picked up their saddlebags and made for the door. But before they reached it the sound of approaching hoofbeats made them stop in their tracks.

"Hold it! Somebody comin'!" exclaimed Luke, as Benson hurried to the shop door and peered out from behind the blind.

"It's a masked man!" hissed Benson. "Goin' into the express office!"

"Masked man, eh!" mused Steve Grody, and a smile crossed his cruel face. "Just made to order for us!"

"How come?" asked Luke.

"Somebody to pin it on! The masked robber! Joe here's goin' to hold him for the Sheriff!" Drawing one of his guns, Steve Grody handed it to Benson.

Opening the door cautiously the watchmaker slipped out and crossed the street to the express office. There he waited behind the damaged door until the Lone Ranger came out.

"Get 'em up!"

The masked man turned to face Benson's menacing gun. "You're making a mistake . . ." he began, raising his hands.

"I'm makin' a citizen's arrest, that's what I'm makin'," grunted Benson. "And just to make sure you don't try no tricks. . . ." He raised his gun to bring it down on the Lone Ranger's head. But the masked man was too quick for him. Grabbing Benson's gun-wrist with one hand, he thudded the other into the watchmaker's midriff. As Benson doubled up, the Lone Ranger's fist cracked home on his jaw. The gun fell from the watchmaker's fingers as he stumbled and fell.

Seizing his chance, the Lone Ranger ran to Silver, leapt into the saddle and wheeled off down the street.

Benson sat up, shaking his head to clear it. Then, seeing the gun lying by his side, he picked it up and loosed off three shots after the masked man. The last shot registered a lucky hit on the heel of the Lone Ranger's left boot, clipping off a fair-sized piece.

As the masked man disappeared

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round a bend, Benson struggled to his feet, picked up the piece of boot-heel and walked thoughtfully into the shop.

"Lucky Joe—that's me!" grinned Benson, kicking the door shut behind him. "Got a hunk of the masked man's boot-heel. Shot it off!" He held up the piece for the Grody brothers' inspection.

"What good's a hunk of boot-heel?" demanded Luke.

"It'll send him to prison—that's what good it is. It's proof—proof he did the robbery!"

Steve Grody shrugged. "Maybe you're right. If you're not, it's your own funeral." He picked up his saddlebag. "Come on, Luke, let's get out of here. Joe, take a look outside."

Benson opened the door and glanced up and down the street. Then, suddenly, he popped back in, shut the door and exclaimed breathlessly, "They're comin' back! The whole town's comin' back from the rodeo! And there's Tom Ellsworth's buckboard—an Injun's drivin' it." He turned to peep through the blind. "And that's Tom Ellsworth lyin' with his head in his wife's lap!"

"But he's dead, ain't he?" hissed Steve Grody.

Benson shook his head. "Can't be. If he was they wouldn't be takin' him into Doc Varney's office . . . And here comes the Sheriff! Get back! Get back inside!"

As the Grodys retreated into the back room there was a loud knocking at the door.

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"Just a minute!" cried Benson as he ran to open it. "Sheriff! Am I glad to see you! Come in! Come in!"

Sheriff Adams stumped into the shop and looked around him. "What do you know about this robbery, Joe?"

"Everything, Sam—just everything." Benson appeared eager to help. "I saw the robber—a masked man. I tangled with him." He pulled the piece of boot-heel from his pocket. "Shot this hunk off his heel. Here—take it. Find the boot that fits and you've got your robber."

The Sheriff took the fragment and studied it carefully. "I see . . . Just *one* man, Joe?"

"That's all I saw."

The Sheriff walked to the door and opened it. "Come along with me, Joe. Tom Ellsworth's been shot—and his wife says there were *two* outlaws."

A very worried Joe Benson followed the Sheriff along the street and into Doc Varney's office. On a couch, his head bandaged, lay the unconscious Tom Ellsworth.

"How is he, Doc?" asked the Sheriff.

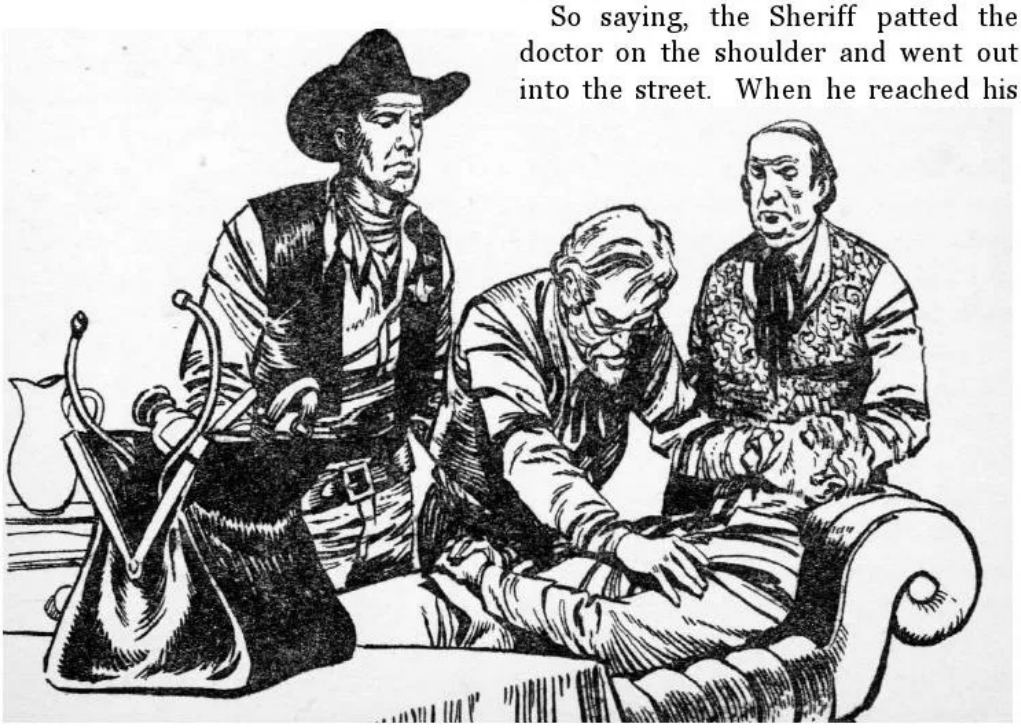
The doctor shook his head. "Pretty bad concussion, but he'll make it all right if I can get him to a specialist in Abilene."

"Where's his Missus?"

"In there." The doctor waved towards another room. "I gave her something to quiet her. She'll be out for—oh, five or six hours."

"Too bad. I wanted to get her story again—alongside Joe's here. I'll fix it so you can take Tom on the morning stage to Abilene."

So saying, the Sheriff patted the doctor on the shoulder and went out into the street. When he reached his



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own office he found two men waiting for him.

"Hello, Sam." The Lone Ranger extended a hand to the Sheriff.

"You! So *you're* the masked man!" The Sheriff shook the Lone Ranger's hand warmly.

"I'm afraid so, Sam. Glad you haven't forgotten me."

"Forget you! After what you did for me in Abilene!"

"That long time ago," smiled Tonto.

"Sam, we've got a mean case on our hands." The Lone Ranger was serious now. "There's nothing between me and that cell block but the word of Tom Ellsworth."

"Don't I know it," agreed the Sheriff. "And it may be some time before Tom can tell us anything about it. The Doc's taking him to a specialist in Abilene by tomorrow's stage."

Meanwhile, in the back room of Joe Benson's shop, Steve Grody was busy. He was putting the finishing touches to a weird contraption which consisted mainly of an alarm clock and some sticks of explosive—a home-made time-bomb. The bomb complete, he lifted it gingerly and placed it in an old trunk which had been stuffed with rags. A few more old clothes on top, and the trunk was shut and locked.

Steve Grody' grunted with satisfaction. "With that trunk on the Abilene stage the old guy isn't goin' to open his eyes in time to point a finger at us—isn't goin' to open them at all, in fact!"

The men grinned at each other.

Next morning, the Lone Ranger, Tonto and the Sheriff were riding towards Joe Benson's shop. "Bit early for Joe's door to be open." The Sheriff eased his horse and pointed.

The three men went inside.

"Joe! Joe Benson!" called the Sheriff.

There was no answer. Suddenly Tonto pointed to the safe behind the counter. "Kemo Sabay! Look!"

The safe had been blown open and rifled of its contents. Taking in the situation at a glance, the Lone Ranger leapt over the counter and went into the back room . . . On the floor lay Joe Benson—dead.

"Reckon we were right about him bein' mixed up in it," said the Sheriff, coming up behind the masked man.

"Something in his hand!" pointed Tonto. "A pencil."

The Lone Ranger went over to kneel beside the body. "He must have been trying to write something . . . Here it is!"

Scrawled on the whitewashed wall near the baseboard were the words: "The Grodys did it for the gold. Bomb on stagecoach—will go off 9 • • •"

The Lone Ranger was on his feet in a flash. "Nine! Nine o'clock!" He glanced at his watch. "It's a quarter-past eight now—and the stage left at seven!"

"With Tom Ellsworth and his wife in it!" breathed the Sheriff.

"And doctor, too!" added Tonto, as he ran after the Lone Ranger to the waiting horses. . . .

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Meanwhile, the heavy stage lumbered on its way to Abilene. The driver was taking it easy. The springs weren't as good as they used to be, and he had a sick man inside. Pulling a fob watch from inside his shirt, the old man on the driving seat screwed up his eyes to see the time—8.50. The stage was almost on* schedule.

The driver leaned over to peer inside the coach. A still unconscious Tom Ellsworth was propped up on cushions in one corner. Beside him sat his wife, with the doctor facing them. Strapped on top of the coach was the passengers' luggage—together with a battered old tin trunk. . . .

But there were other eyes watching the Abilene stage. The brothers Grody sat their horses on the mountain trail, gazing down at the winding road below.

" I wouldn't miss this for anything," grinned Steve. "Isn't often you can see a stagecoach go up in the air!"

His brother laughed and looked at his watch. "Only ten more minutes. . . ."

"Hey! Look back there!" The smile had melted from Steve Grody's face as he sat pointing to the road behind the coach. "It's that masked man and the Injun! Come on!"

Down the slope spurred the two men, but they were just too late. By the time they reached the road the Lone Ranger and Tonto had thundered past. Steve Grody unleashed two angry shots after the masked man.

"The road winds round below

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here," he bellowed to his brother. "We can still head 'em off!"

Once more the gunmen headed downwards.

Meanwhile, the stage driver had heard the shots. Turning, he saw two men overtaking him fast—one of them masked. At once his whip was out and he was urging the horses round a sharp bend in the road. The stage swayed as it gathered speed, crashing and bouncing on the rough track. Then, with a rending crash, one of the near wheels struck a large boulder and was smashed to matchwood. The stage heeled over and ground to a stop as the Lone Ranger and Tonto rode up.

In a flash the masked man was out of the saddle and tearing open the coach door. "Get out!" he shouted to the occupants. "There's a bomb aboard—it'll explode any second! Here, ma'am, let me help you."

Kate Ellsworth was on the floor of the coach, clinging to her husband. But as the woman tried to move, a groan escaped from her lips. She pointed to her foot, which was trapped at the ankle between the broken floorboards.

The doctor started tearing at the wooden planks to release the foot as the Lone Ranger leapt outside.

"Up on top, Tonto!" he cried. "Throw all the luggage off!"

Like twin hurricanes, the masked man and the Indian were on the

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coach roof slashing free the luggage and throwing it down the slope at the side of the road. Not knowing in which trunk the bomb had been hidden, they had to get rid of everything. One thing they did know—it might go off at any second, blowing them and the coach sky high!

The last thing to go was the battered tin trunk. The Lone Ranger lifted it high and hurled it from him. As it went crashing down the slope it exploded with a deafening roar, levelling the undergrowth for yards around—undergrowth through which the brothers Grody were at that moment creeping. A hat rising high in the air told the Lone Ranger that justice had unwittingly been done.

A few days later, the Sheriff of Flat Rock had some visitors. They were the Lone Ranger, Tonto, and Tom and Kate Ellsworth—a Tom well on the way to recovery from his injury.

" Sorry we couldn't save the Grodys for you, Sheriff," the masked man was saying, "but we did get the gold from their saddlebags to prove they were the thiefs." He moved towards the door. "Now,, if you'll excuse Tonto and I, we'll have to be going. Good-bye, Tom—Adios, ma'am."

"Bless you for what you did for us," said Kate Ellsworth softly.

"He never did say his name," said Tom after a long pause.

The Sheriff grinned. "He never does. But I don't mind telling you he's the best friend the West ever had. He's the Lone Ranger!"

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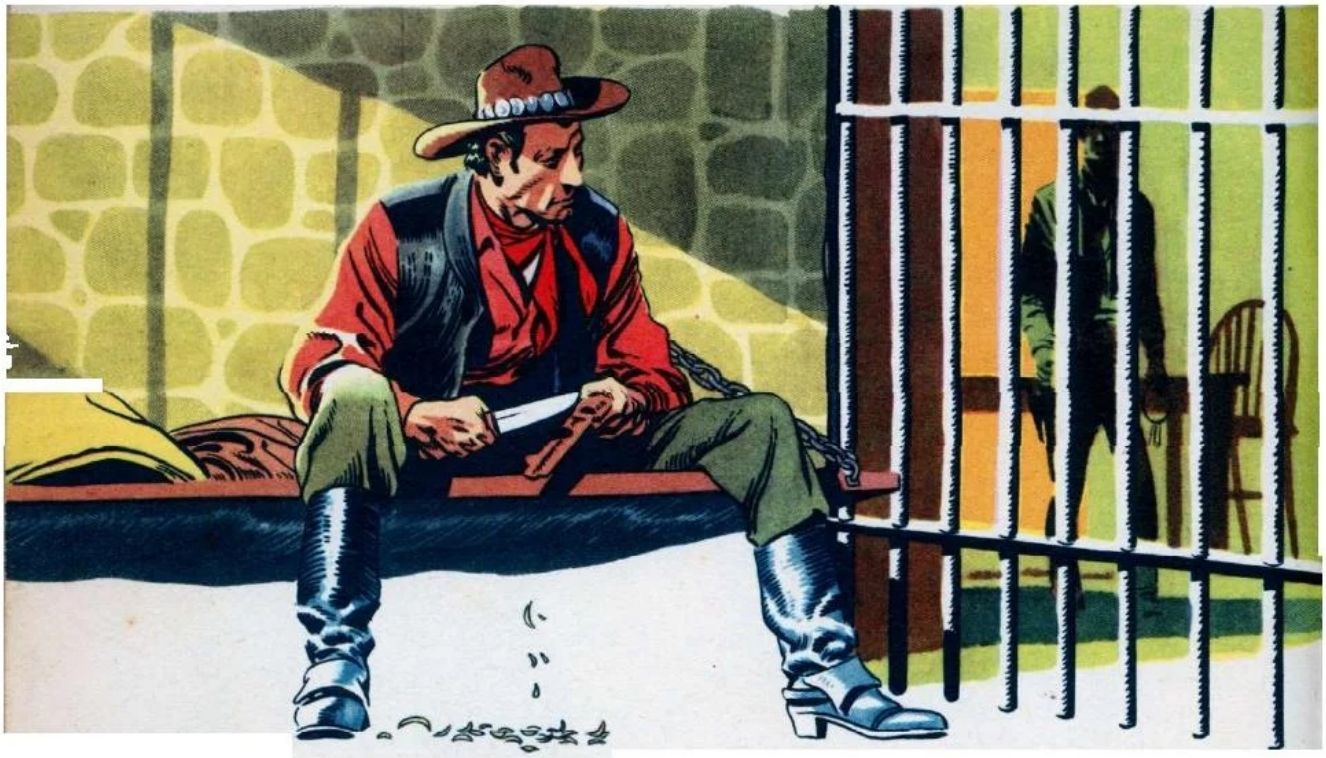

GHOST TOWN FURY

Wade Glanton's knife moved quickly and expertly, whittling and shaping the piece of wood in his hand. Clanton was putting the finishing touches to a gun—a wooden gun. Every now and then he stopped to peer through the bars of his prison cell. There was no one about, but Wade Clanton knew that his brothers, Vic and Johnny, were in the cells next to his own. And he knew they were ready . . .

A sound of whistling, and the armed guard came walking down the dimly-lit corridor.

"When?" whispered Johnny through the bars.

"Next time round!" Wade came to the front of the cell, holding the wooden gun behind him. Johnny pulled some tobacco from his pocket and began rolling himself a cigarette, watching the guard out of the corner of his eye as he did so.

"Hey! Got a match?" Johnny waved the finished cigarette through the bars on the side next to Wade's cell.

The guard stopped whistling to fish a box of matches from his pocket. He lit one and held it out to light the cigarette, and as he did so Johnny grabbed him, crashing him into the bars. At the same moment Wade reached out and pushed the wooden gun into the guard's ribs.

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"One sound and you're dead!" With his other hand Wade wrenched the keys from the guard's belt, unlocked the cell door and stepped out into the corridor. Two steps and he had the guard's gun out of its holster, and a split second later he had brought it down on the back of the man's head. The guard slumped to the floor.

The Glanton brothers moved quickly. In no time they were out in the prison yard, and within a few minutes all three were safely over the outer wall and running for freedom . ..

"Grime wave continues! Clantons rob stage!" The Lone Ranger put down the newspaper from which he had been reading and looked thoughtfully at Tonto on the other side of the camp-fire.

"Them plenty smart, Kemo Sabay," said the Indian with a shake of his head. "Always ride to badlands—not leave trail."

"I know, Tonto," agreed the masked man, "but they have to be caught—badlands or not; and I think I know who might be able to help us—your friend Black Hawk. He has a ranch near here, hasn't he?"

Tonto nodded. "Him know badlands. Maybe have idea where Clantons hide out."

The two men rose and made for their horses.

A few minutes later, when the Lone Ranger and Tonto reached Black Hawk's modest ranch-house, they found two boys of about twelve playing on the front porch. One was a serious-looking young Indian called

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Keo, the other a white boy, Scott Drew.

"Father! Come quick!" shouted Keo as the masked man and Tonto dismounted and walked towards the porch steps.

" Good morning, boys! Your father at home, Keo?" asked the Lone Ranger.

The Indian boy nodded silently, surprised that the Lone Ranger remembered him. The house door opened and Black Hawk himself appeared to welcome his visitors. He was an impressively tall Indian, despite the fact that he walked with a limp and carried a stick to help himself along.

"Welcome, my friends!" cried the Indian warmly. "It has been many moons since you visit me." He waved his visitors inside the ranch-house. "What brings you here?"

"We come to ask your help, Black Hawk," began Tonto. "We on trail of Clanton brothers. We certain they have hideout in badlands north of here. You know area well."

Black Hawk looked doubtful. "That is true, but it has been long time since I have been out there. I am not sure there is much I can tell you, but I will try to remember." He smiled. "You will spend the night here?"

"Thank you, Black Hawk," said the masked man. "But we must leave first thing in the morning."

The Indian turned to the two boys, who were standing just inside the door staring at the Lone Ranger. "Put horses in the stable. See that they get food and water."

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Keo nodded, and the boys ran off.

"Is that really him? The Lone Ranger?" asked an excited Scott as he led Tonto's paint horse towards the stable.

Keo nodded and pushed out his chest. "Of course! And he remembered me! He and Tonto are two of our best friends. You heard them—they came to ask my father's help."

Scott sighed deeply. "Maybe some day you and I can be like the masked man and Tonto. We'll have horses like these and go out and capture outlaws and . . ."

"Hey! That's a good idea!" Keo stopped suddenly in his tracks and pointed eagerly at his friend. "And we don't have to wait till we grow up! We can do it now! The masked man said he needed help!"

Scott wasn't quite so sure. "But, Keo—those badlands are dangerous!"

"My father taught me all about tracking," persisted Keo, "and I'm an Indian, just like Tonto. Indians know all about that sort of thing."

"My pa wouldn't like it," said Scott doubtfully, "but I guess he wouldn't have to know."

"We'll leave them a note. We can ride out first thing in the morning before anybody is awake. We don't really have to *catch* those outlaws. We'll just find them and tell the masked man and Tonto."

Scott was by this time as enthusiastic

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as his friend. "Sure," he smiled, "then there'll be four of us searching for the Glanton gang!" He held out his hand. "We'll make a great team, Keo!"

"We sure will, Kemo Sabay!" replied the Indian boy seriously.

Next morning Black Hawk accompanied his honoured guests to their horses.

"The places you've mentioned are worth a try, Black Hawk," smiled the Lone Ranger. "At least it's a start."

The Indian pointed to his injured leg. "If my leg not this way, I would come with you," he said regretfully.

"I know you would, Black Hawk." The masked man looked around the ranch yard. "Where's Keo? I wanted to say good-bye to him."

Black Hawk frowned. "I wonder same thing. It not like boy to leave without telling me."

At that there was a cry from the stable, and Tonto came running out with a piece of paper in his hand. "Kemo Sabay! Me find note in stable. Boys go to look for outlaws!"

"They what!" The Lone Ranger

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took the note from Tonto's hand and read it quickly. "This is serious!"

"I've got to find them!" cried Black Hawk, starting towards the stable. But the masked man restrained him. "I know how you feel, Black Hawk, but *you* can't go after them. You'd better notify Scott's family." He glanced at Tonto. "Anyway, according to this note, it looks as though Tonto and I are responsible. It's our job to bring those boys back."

As the Lone Ranger and Tonto mounted their horses, there was fear in Black Hawk's eyes. "Badlands big place, my friends. Me hope Clanton brothers not find boys first!"

Serious and determined, the masked man and his friend urged their horses out of the ranch yard and headed north at a full gallop.

Some time later, Keo and Scott, looking dusty and tired, eased their horses to gaze around them at the endless miles of barren, rocky country stretching in all directions.

"Seems like we've been riding for days," Scott lifted his water-bottle to his parched lips, "even though we only left this morning. You any idea

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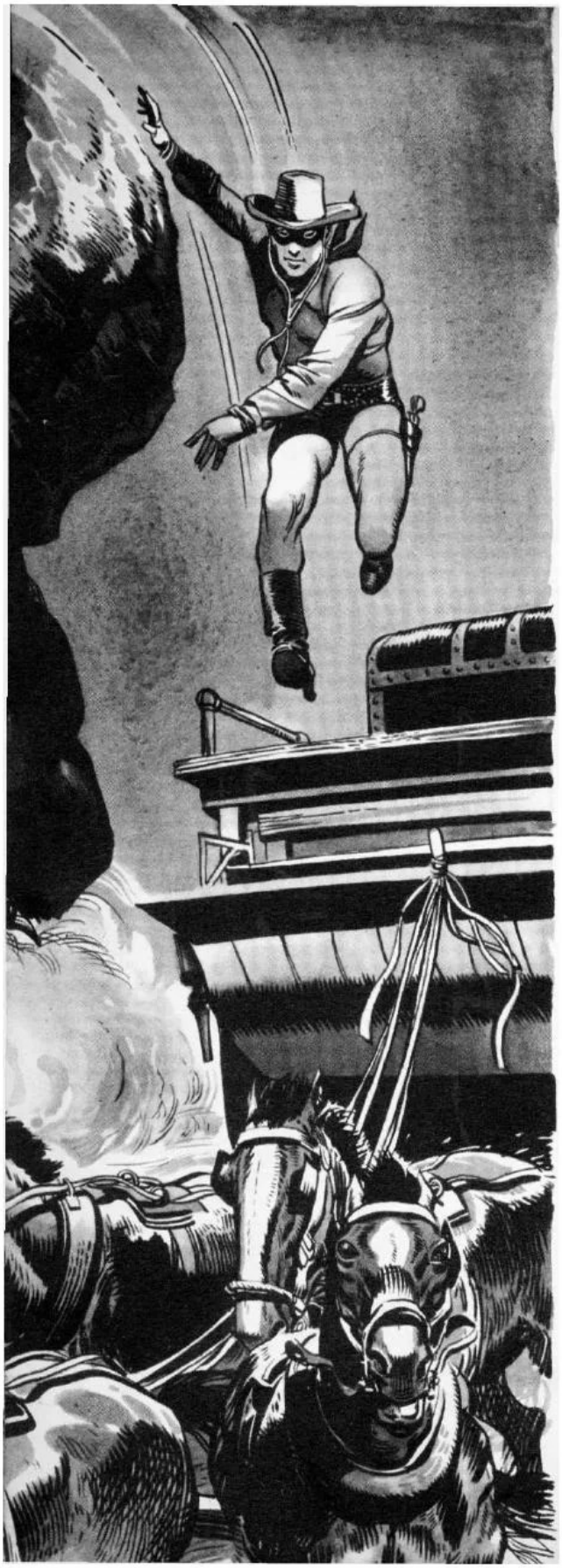

where we are? All those rocks look the same to me."

Keo smiled confidently. "It's just a matter of reading the tracks and signs." He pointed. "Like that rock over there. It's . . ." Keo stopped, and a worried expression crept over his face.

"What's the matter, Keo?"

"I-—I think that's the same rock we passed some time this morning. . . . Of course there *could* be two alike!"

Scott frowned. "I'll bet we're lost, that's what!"

"We couldn't be. I—I was sure I had our trail all worked out . . . but now I'm not so sure." Keo climbed off his horse for a closer look at the offending rock. "Anyway," he forced a smile, "let's ride that way. Nothing's going to happen to us, Kemo Sabay!"

Meanwhile, not far away from the two boys, the Clanton brothers sat their horses looking down at the trail leading through a steep-sided pass.

"I still think this is a bad idea, Wade," Vic Clanton was saying. "We're out of water, and we've still half a day's ride to the hideout."

A hot and dusty Wade did not look at his brother as he replied, "A little pxtra gold never hurt anybody. Soon as we hit this stage we'll head for the hideout and get ourselves a nice long rest. Here she comes now!"

As the stagecoach came round the bend of the pass, Wade eased his horse downwards until he stopped on the trail directly in its path. His shoulders slumped and his hand clutched at his shoulder.

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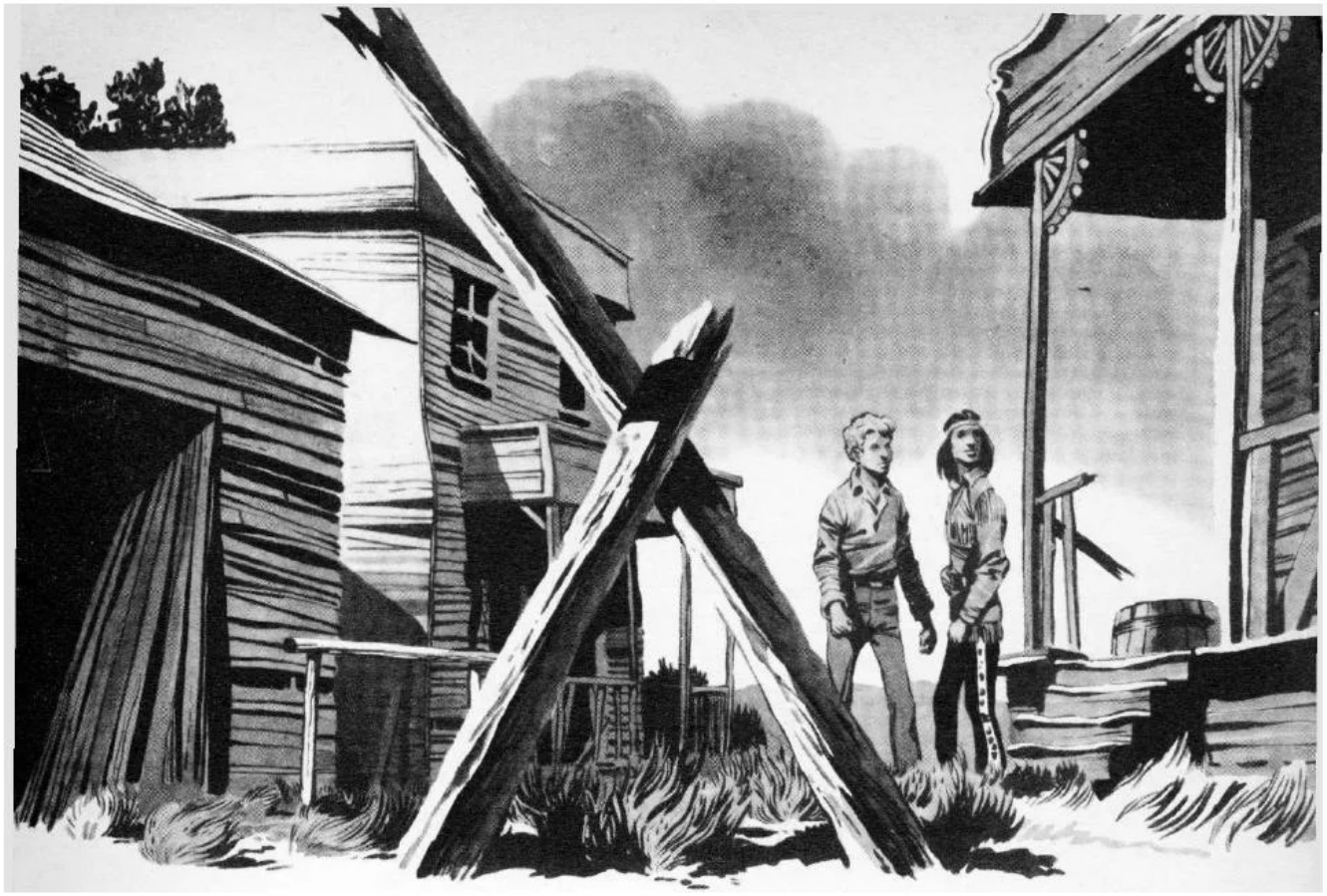

Driver — need help — outlaws — they robbed me!" Wade shouted weakly as the stage driver pulled his horses to a stop and looked down suspiciously at the man in front of him.

"Doctor . . . Got to get a doctor!" The outlaw slithered from his horse and staggered towards the coach as the driver picked up his rifle and turned to climb down from the seat.

"Drop it, Mister! Quick!" A gun had appeared in Wade's hand.

The driver started to bring up his gun, only to receive a thudding blow from Wade's gun barrel. The rifle went off harmlessly into the air as the driver crumpled unconscious to the ground.

Vic and Johnny rode up to find Wade shooting the lock off the stage strong-box and stuffing money into his pocket as fast as he could go.

"Well, it worked . . began Johnny. Then he stopped suddenly, staring down the pass to where two horsemen were riding hard towards them. One of the riders wore a black mask, the other was an Indian. "Wade! We've been spotted!"

With one leap Wade was down from the stage and on to his horse. Pulling his gun he loosed some shots into the ground at the heels of the stage horses, yelling at the top of his voice as he did so. The frightened horses reared and bolted towards the oncoming Lone Ranger and Tonto, while the brothers galloped off in the opposite direction.

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"Tonto! See to the driver!" shouted the masked man, turning Silver and spurring towards a point where the pass narrowed to a few feet in width, banked by steep rocks. There he leapt from his saddle and climbed up the canyon side until he reached a point where he was directly over the trail. There he tensed himself, and as the stage horses charged through the narrow defile, he jumped —landing on the roof of the stage. From there he scrambled down to the driver's seat and grabbed the reins. A few seconds later he had pulled the sweating horses to a stop.

Tonto was bending over the unconscious driver. "Him hurt plenty bad, Kemo Sabay," said the Indian as the Lone Ranger rode up.

The masked man dropped to one knee to inspect the man's head wound. "We'll have to get him to a doctor before we continue our search, Tonto."

Gently they lifted the fallen man and began carrying him towards the stage.

Meanwhile, Keo and Scott, after wandering aimlessly over many miles of barren country, had reached a town. But this was no ordinary town; there was no sign of life anywhere, the buildings were rotten and falling down, the deserted streets were overgrown.

"Gosh! I never knew there was a ghost town in the badlands!" exclaimed Scott, looking round at the desolate scene.

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"Me either," agreed a frightened-looking Keo. "You don't believe in ghosts, do you?"

Scott shook his head uncertainly. "Then we might as well spend the night here. It'll be dark soon. We'll put our horses behind that old hotel."

The two boys led their mounts round behind the hotel and tied them to a battered hitching rail. They tried the back door of the hotel, but it was locked. So they went round to the front, where the door hung crazily on one hinge. Inside the hotel lobby everything was covered in dust; there were cobwebs everywhere.

"Sure is spooky in here," said Keo in a half-whisper.

Scott gulped. "Look, Keo—supplies! At least we'll eat." He pointed to a pile of unopened tins just inside the doorway. "And look!" The boy bent down to pick up something from the floor. "It's a wooden gun!"

"Looks real, too," said Keo.

Scott pushed the wooden gun into his belt and looked around him. A stairway with its steps half rotted away led up to an inside balcony, behind which were a number of doors.

"We can sleep on that balcony," pointed Keo. "From there we can have a good view of any spooks that come in!"

Scott nodded. "Come on! Let's get our bed-rolls and a candle."

A few hours later, Keo awoke and looked at the half-burnt candle, then at Scott, who stirred and opened his eyes. "What time d'you suppose it is?" asked the young Indian.

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Scott glanced at the burning candle. "About midnight, I guess. Let's try to get some sleep."

The boys had hardly settled down once more, when they both suddenly sat bolt upright, wide-eyed with fright.

"What's that?" whispered Keo.

"I—I don't know—horses!"

Keo leaned over and blew out the candle as footsteps could be heard coming towards the hotel entrance. Peering through the balcony rails the boys saw three men come into the lobby, each with a bed-roll under his arm. It was the Clanton brothers!

"Whew! I feel like I been in the saddle for a month!" growled Johnny Clanton, tossing his bed-roll on the floor.

Wade was rummaging among the tins. "Quit complainin'. It's better than prison. Let's have some grub."

The three men picked up some of the tins and went through a doorway into an adjoining room.

"It's the Clantons!" whispered Keo.

"I—I know!" gulped Scott. "Now that we've found them, what are we going to do?"

"I'm all for getting out of here. 'Maybe we can get out while they're in that other room."

The boys climbed out of their blankets, and Keo took the lead as they started for the stairs leading down to the lobby. The steps creaked with what seemed terrifying loudness as they made their slow way down; but the outlaws didn't seem to hear.

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Then, suddenly, it happened! Scott's foot landed on a board that was even more rotten than the rest—and went right through. The boy groaned with pain as his friend turned to help him. One of the outlaws exclaimed, "What's that?" Back up the stairs hurried the boys, Scott hobbling on one leg. The balcony seemed a long way off, but they made it and lay down to await events.

Back into the lobby came the three men, looking around them suspiciously.

"Take a look upstairs, Vic," said Wade, pointing to the floor above.

Vic started up the rotten steps, but as his foot hit the first one it gave way under his weight. "You want me to kill myself?" he growled. "These steps are rotten. Only a midget could get up there without breakin' his neck."

Wade shrugged his shoulders. "All right. Perhaps we've been imaginin' things. Let's get some sleep."

After another glance round, the three men laid out their bed-rolls and settled down for the night.

The two fearful boys watched them in silence for some time, then Scott put his mouth close to his friend's ear and whispered, "We're trapped! What are we going to do?"

"We'll just have to wait till they go to sleep and try to sneak out."

"But, my ankle. I'd never make it!"

"Then I'll have to go alone," whispered the Indian boy. "You

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stay here. I'll try to find the Lone Ranger and Tonto."

For what seemed an age the boys peered down at the figures below. After some time a trio of snores told them that the outlaws were asleep.

" Good luck, Keo," whispered Scott, as his friend got to his feet and started down the stairway once more. Carefully, very carefully, he made his way, testing each step before putting all his weight on it. Half-way down there was a loud creak, and one of the outlaws stirred in his sleep. Keo stood still, his heart pounding, hardly daring to breathe.

Up on the balcony Scott let out a sigh of relief as his friend began his descent once more. A few more steps and Keo was creeping like a shadow past the sleeping brothers and out of the hotel door.

Soon after sunrise next morning, the Lone Ranger and Tonto were just beginning another day of search for the missing boys. They had paused on a piece of rising ground to look around them for any sign of life, when suddenly Tonto stood up in his stirrups and pointed. "Kemo Sabay! Look!"

A black horse was being ridden towards them, and on its back was a boy.

" It's Keo!" cried the Lone Ranger, spurring Silver to meet the boy.

"We found them! We found the Clanton brothers!" shouted Keo as he rode up to the two men. "Scott's hurt his ankle. He's in the ghost

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town—that's where the Clantons' hideout is!"

"Can you lead us to this ghost town?" asked the masked man.

Keo nodded eagerly. "Yes, sir! It's back that way. You're—you're not mad at us, are you?"

The Lone Ranger looked seriously down at the boy. "We'll talk about that later, son. Right now we have to get to this ghost town of yours—and quickly!"

Meanwhile, back at the ghost-town hotel, the Clanton brothers had saddled their horses and were gathering up their supplies, ready to move out.

"Everything's ready, Wade," Johnny Clanton was saying, "but I wish you'd make up your mind. First it's a long rest—now we make for the border."

Wade grinned. "I just decided we should start spendin' some of this money we got from the stage. Can't do us any good in a ghost town."

Up on the balcony, Scott was making a difficult decision. He *could* not let these outlaws get away to freedom over the border just as easily as that. The boy pulled himself up painfully with the help of the balcony rail and took the wooden gun from his belt.

"One move and I'll shoot!" he cried in a shaky voice. "We have you surrounded!"

In a flash, three guns were pointing at Scott.

"Why, it's only a kid!" grinned Wade.

"Maybe I am a kid—but I can shoot this gun straight!" cried Scott with increasing bravado.

"Can you?" smiled Wade. "Let's see you do it." He turned to Johnny and whispered, "He's got my wooden gun."

"There's—there's lawmen all round this place!" called down Scott.

At this, Wade let out a roar of laughter. "Are there, kid? All right. Vic, go and take a look outside."

Vic smiled, went over to the dusty front window, and cleaned a piece of glass with his hand. Then he jumped as though he had been shot. "Wade! There *is* somebody out there!" The outlaw drew his gun, broke the window with it, and fired out into the street.

The bullet kicked up a spurt of dust close to the feet of the approaching Lone Ranger and Tonto. Keo had been told to wait round a corner a few yards back.

"Round behind the hotel, Tonto!" cried the masked man, flattening himself against a wall.

Tonto sprinted down a side street and round behind the hotel, so that he could approach it from the other side.

A few seconds later a figure ran out of the hotel door and made for the waiting horses. It was Johnny Clanton. But he had barely time to put one foot in the stirrup before the Lone Ranger ran up, pulled him down to his own level and floored him with a thudding right to the jaw.

Vic Clanton appeared in the doorway, shooting as he came out. It was then that Tonto took a hand in the

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situation. Running along the street from the opposite direction, he leapt on the outlaw, and the two men were soon a struggling, heaving mass, rolling over and over on the road.

Into the hotel ran the Lone Ranger, to find Wade Clanton standing, gun in hand, in the middle of the lobby, obviously trying to make up his mind which way to turn. With a quick shot in the masked man's direction he turned and started to run up the stairs. In a flash the Lone Ranger was after him, and as the two men struggled on the lower steps the rotten boards suddenly gave way altogether. With a rending crash the masked man and his opponent thudded to the floor; but Wade Clanton was underneath. He lay still as the Lone Ranger picked himself up and brushed the dust from his shirt.

A boy watching breathlessly from the gallery above smiled happily.

Next day there was quite a gathering in Black Hawk's little ranchhouse. On a couch sat Scott, his bandaged ankle propped up in front of him. Beside him stood Keo, looking sheepishly down at the toe of his right shoe.

"You have my promise, Father," Keo was saying. "I will never again do anything so foolish."

"Me too!" echoed Scott enthusiastically. "I can hardly wait for my folks to get here so I can tell them how sorry I am."

The Lone Ranger looked seriously at the two boys. "I think you've both learned a good lesson. You should never go anywhere without telling your parents."

"Yes, sir!" said both boys in unison.

The Lone Ranger smiled as he walked towards the door with Tonto.

" Good-bye, my friends—and thank you," said a smiling Black Hawk.

Then the Lone Ranger and his Indian comrade were gone. There was nothing but the drumming of hoofbeats dying slowly into the distance.

Scott looked up at his friend. " Boy, we're lucky having friends like Tonto and the Lone Ranger!"

"We sure are, Kemo Sabay!" grinned Keo.

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THE COURAGE OF TONTO

The Lone Ranger and Tonto were two hours out from Fort Apache, on their way to the next fort, almost fifty miles away. For the past hour they had been riding across desert country—rocky, forbidding land with only an occasional patch of scrub.

As the two men topped a rise overlooking a desert valley, Tonto reined his horse and pointed:

"Kemo Sabay!"

Riding like the wind across the valley floor were two Indian braves, while some distance behind them rode four white men, their guns cracking as they fired at the Indians ahead. As the masked man and the Indian watched, the two braves urged their horses into a dry arroyo that cut its way between low desert hills.

"That arroyo lead into Apache country, Kemo Sabay!" exclaimed Tonto in alarm. "If white men follow Indians, they be killed!"

"We've got to stop them, Tonto!"

Together the two men plunged their horses down the slope to cut off the white men. Across the sun-baked valley they galloped, to reach the mouth of the arroyo just ahead of the Indians' pursuers. The Lone Ranger pulled Silver to a rearing stop and held up his hand. "Just a minute!"

Reining hard, the four white men

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Stared angrily at the Lone Ranger. One of them rode close to the masked man. He was powerfully built, with brutish, cruel features.

"Now just who might you be, Mister, hidin' behind that mask and givin' orders?"

"I'm not giving orders," replied the Lone Ranger. "I'm just warning you. That's Apache country, and if you go any further you'll almost certainly be killed."

"Listen, Mister!" The big man was angry now. "Them two Apache varmints ran off with two of my best horses! No thievin' redskin's gonna steal horses from Lew Pearson and get away with it!" He started to ride forward. "Outa my way!"

"Hold it, Pearson!" A gun had appeared in the Lone Ranger's hand. "We don't want to start another war between the whites and the Apaches. I think we can get your horses back for you. We'll ride in and see Grey Horse, the chief. We know him. I'm sure he will listen to reason."

Tonto had taken a piece of white cloth from his saddle-bag and was tying it to the muzzle of his rifle.

"Reason with a redskin!" declared Pearson in disgust. "In my book, Mister, the only good Injun is a *dead* 'un!"

"Nevertheless, if you want your horses back, you'll stay here!" The Lone Ranger and Tonto wheeled and headed into the arroyo, the white flag fluttering from the muzzle of the Indian's rifle.

Pearson swung himself out of the saddle and grinned evilly at the other men. "Build a fire. Fix some coffee. I want everything to look peaceful when that masked man gets back . . ."

It was almost an hour later when the Lone Ranger and Tonto came riding out of the arroyo. With them was Chief Grey Horse, a dignified old Indian, his face wrinkled and leathered by the Western sun. Grey Horse was leading the two stolen horses.

"Well, stranger, I got to hand it to you!" Pearson rose to his feet as the Lone Ranger approached with the two horses and handed over the bridles.

"The old man is Chief Grey Horse." The masked man nodded to where the chief stood a few paces off. "He came along to make sure you got your horses back. His son, Red Cloud, is in the cavalry at Fort Apache. The old chief is very proud of that, and he's anxious to keep peace with the whites."

"Well, ain't that nice," smirked Pearson. "You tell the chief I've no hard feelin's."

"I'll tell him." The masked man went over to the chief. "White man give thanks to chief for return of horses. Tonto and I also thank the chief. As long as white men and Indians can talk things over, peace will not be broken."

The old man's face wrinkled in a smile. "Me know white-man-in-mask friend of Indian. Me wish all white men friend of Indian."

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Raising his hand in a salute, he wheeled his horse and started to ride away . . .

Crack! A rifle shot rang out and Chief Grey Horse threw up his hands, pitched from the saddle to the ground and lay still.

Thunderstruck, the Lone Ranger and Tonto turned to find themselves gazing into the barrels of guns held by Pearson and his men.

"Just drop your guns—both of you!" He jerked his head backwards. "On your horses, men!"

Keeping the masked man and Tonto covered, Pearson and his gang climbed on to their horses and rode off. Over his shoulder the big man shouted back: "Like I said, Mister, the only good Injun is a dead 'un!"

But the Lone Ranger wasn't listening. He was on his knees beside the fallen chief.

"It's a mortal wound, Tonto. He may have a chance—but I doubt it. Let's get him to the doctor at Fort Apache." They started to lift the old man on to his horse. "Easy now—easy does it . . ."

Back at Fort Apache a young trooper dismounted outside the Commandant's office and went inside. He was Red Cloud, son of Chief Grey Horse.

"Dispatch from Washington, sir." He handed a sealed envelope to Major Jonathan, Commandant of the fort, saluted and turned to go.

"Corporal!" Red Cloud halted and turned. "This dispatch concerns you." The Major read aloud: "A special citation for bravery in action and promotion to the rank of sergeant is being made to Corporal Red Cloud, Forty-first U.S. Cavalry." The officer looked up, smiling.

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"Never thought I'd be handing a citation to that little Indian boy who used to hang around the fort and plague us to join the cavalry."

"Thank you, sir." Red Cloud grinned, saluted and went out.

As he emerged from the office, two men rode up, leading a third horse on which was tied a wounded Indian—an old man. As the two men untied the Indian and lifted him carefully to the ground Red Cloud stopped, staring.

"Grey Horse! My father!"

The young man ran forward and dropped to his knees beside his wounded father.

"Grey Horse! It's me—Red Cloud. Tell me—who do this?"

The old man opened his eyes to see his son bending over him. "White-man-in-mask," he whispered feebly, "lead Grey Horse—ambush. Him friends—kill . . ."

With that the chief fell back, dead.

Red Cloud rose slowly, staring down at his father. Then his eyes met the Lone Ranger's, his hand went to his knife.

"That's not true!" The Lone Ranger's words were too late. Red Cloud whipped out his knife and lunged at the masked man, who caught the Indian's upraised arm and grappled with him.

"You kill my father. White man die!" screamed Red Cloud, struggling to force the knife home. But the masked man was too strong for him. The knife was twisted from the Indian's grasp and fell to the ground, from where Tonto picked it up as soldiers came up to hold Red Cloud, still struggling.

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"Hold it, Red Cloud!" It was the voice of the fort Commandant. "I know this masked man. He's not a killer."

"My father say white man kill. I believe my father!"

The officer made a sign to the troopers. "Confine him to barracks till he cools off."

As the soldiers dragged Red Cloud away, the Major turned questioningly to the Lone Ranger. "What happened?"

"Grey Horse was killed by a man named Lew Pearson. Do you know him?"

"Know him!" exclaimed the Major. "He's one of the worst troublemakers in the territory!"

At that there was a shout, and the three men turned in time to see Red Cloud wrench himself free from the troopers who were holding him, race to his father's horse, leap on to its back and disappear through the gate in a cloud of dust.

"After him!" shouted the Major. The soldiers raced for their horses, and the Lone Ranger was about to do the same when the Commandant laid a hand on his arm. "No, Ranger. You're a civilian. Let the men bring him back."

But the troopers did not find Red Cloud, and later that day it was a dispirited Commandant who sat at his desk discussing the situation with the Lone Ranger and Tonto.

"Him chief now," Tonto was saying. "Him turn whole Apache nation against white man."

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"Unless Pearson is brought to justice and we prove to Red Cloud that the white man's law applies equally to whites and Indians," added the Lone Ranger.

"If we only could, Ranger." The Commandant put his head in his hands.

"Why can't we?"

"Because Pearson's a civilian, that's why!" The Commandant rose indignantly to his feet. "And the army has no jurisdiction over civilians!"

The masked man and Tonto glanced at each other.

"Just where is Pearson's ranch, Major?"

"Box Canyon—fifteen miles north of here . . ." The Major broke off as he realised the meaning of the question. "You're not thinking of going after him alone, are you? You haven't a chance!"

"We have no choice, Major," answered the Lone Ranger grimly. "We'll ride as far as we can tonight, make camp, and hit the ranch at dawn."

The two men made for the door.

That night the Lone Ranger and Tonto made camp in a rocky gully not far from the Pearson ranch, and the masked man was awake with the first rays of the morning sun.

"Time to get up, Tonto."

The Indian sat up and stretched. "Me sleep sound, Kemo Sabay."

"We'd better get started. The Pearson ranch should be just over the next ridge." The Lone Ranger was about to get up when **a** spear sang through the air and stuck, quivering, in the ground close to his head. His hand flew to his holster to find it empty!

"Your guns are here, white man!" Red Cloud walked out from behind some rocks, followed by a dozen Apache braves, spears raised menacingly. "You sleep sound, white man. I could have killed you in your sleep, but I have special death for man who kill my father."

"You're making a mistake, Red Cloud," said the Lone Ranger, getting to his feet. "Lew Pearson killed your father and he will be arrested and punished for his crime. Trust me!"

"Trust you, white man? As my father trust you?" Red Cloud came over and pulled the spear out of the ground. "Never again will I listen to lies of white men!"

"Wait!" Tonto stepped between the Apache and the white man. "Me Indian like you, Red Cloud. We speak alone!"

Red Cloud hesitated, then, with a nod to his braves to guard the Lone Ranger, he went a little way off with Tonto.

In a few minutes the young Apache ^returned to face the Lone Ranger.

"Your friend trust you much, white man. He trust you with his life!"

The Lone Ranger turned to his friend. "What is it, Tonto? What have you done?"

"It be all right, Kemo Sabay. Me know you not fail."

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Red Cloud pointed to Tonto. "He say **if** I let you go, you capture killer of my father. If you bring killer, your friend live. If not, he die!"

The Lone Ranger shook his head slowly. "I make no bargains with Tonto's life, Red Cloud."

"You do not understand, Kemo Sabay," pleaded Tonto. "If killer not brought to justice, Red Cloud make war on white man. Many people die. Go now. This Tonto ask—as friend."

Red Cloud jabbed his spear into the ground and pointed to the long shadow cast by the early morning sun. "Look, white man! Shadow of spear is long, for day is young. When sun high, shadow go. When shadow go, you return—or your friend die!"

"Till noon!" The Lone Ranger hesitated for an instant. "I'll need my guns."

Red Cloud held them out. "Here, take them. They are empty. You can load them when you ride away."

"I made a promise, Red Cloud. I'll keep it." The masked man slid the guns into his holsters and walked off towards Silver, who was tethered nearby.

As the Lone Ranger swung himself easily into the saddle and rode off, Red Cloud pointed with Tonto's own gun at the spear standing ominously in the ground. "Watch the shadow, red man. It will get shorter and shorter as the sun comes up —and so will your trust in your white friend."

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Tonto looked Red Cloud straight in the eye and said: "Even if him not come back—me still trust him!"

Red Cloud grunted. "Tie him up!"

It was not long before the Lone Ranger came in sight of the Pearson ranch-house. Dismounting, he surveyed the scene before him. There was no one about.

"They're all inside, big fellow," he spoke in Silver's ear. "Now's our chance!"

Keeping under cover, he led the horse as close to the house as he dared; then lightly tethering Silver he moved cautiously toward the ranch-house, keeping flat against the wall of the barn. Peeping in the window of the house, he could see Pearson's men seated round a long table, industriously shovelling in their breakfast. The masked man moved to the door and kicked it open, two guns levelled.

"Keep your hands on the table!"

Knives and forks were dropped as the gang hastened to obey.

"Where's Pearson?"

"He went to town," growled one of the men.

"When will he be back?"

"Maybe an hour."

"An hour!" echoed the Lone Ranger in dismay. "All right—on your feet."

As the men rose from the table, the masked man moved round to one side of the room. "Line up against the wall!"

Unfortunately for the Lone Ranger, his back was now toward the kitchen door, and through this door was creeping the Mexican cook, his bare feet making no noise on the floorboards. In his hand he held a long kitchen knife . . .

It was only the movement of a shadow that made the Lone Ranger realise his danger. Turning, he shot the knife from the cook's hand. But that instant was enough for the other men. Like a pack of wolves they were on the masked man. A gun-butt slammed down on his head and he fell, unconscious.

When the Lone Ranger stirred and struggled back to consciousness he found himself bound hand and foot, lying on the floor of an outhouse which must have been used as a blacksmith's shop. The memory of Tonto's situation flooded back to him and he began struggling with his bonds. They would not give. Suddenly his eye caught a thin wisp of smoke rising from the forge in one corner of his prison—and someone had left a metal bar sticking in the embers of the fire.

Laboriously the masked man worked his way over to the forge, and with his bound hands began pumping the bellows by the side of it. After a short time the coals tjegan to glow as the air was forced through them. A few minutes of pumping, then the Lone Ranger quickly snatched the metal bar from the fire and let it fall to the floor. One end of it was red-hot. Looking back over his shoulder he carefully steered the rope binding his wrists on to the hot iron. The

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metal touched his skin and he winced, but now the rope was being charred through and in a few seconds his hands were free.

The Lone Ranger had just time to untie his feet when he heard voices outside. He slipped behind the door as it was thrown open and Pearson came in. In a flash the masked man had his arm round Pearson's neck from behind and had drawn the man's gun from its holster.

"Tell them to drop their guns!" The Lone Ranger jabbed the gun into Pearson's back.

"Do like he says!" cried Pearson.

The men outside dropped their guns as the masked man pushed Pearson out of the door.

"Now, get inside, all of you!" The Lone Ranger jerked his head toward the blacksmith's shop.

The men obediently trooped inside, and the Lone Ranger kicked the door shut and dropped the locking bar in place.

"Silver! Here, old fellow!" he called, and almost at once the big horse trotted up.

"Get in the saddle, Pearson!"

As Pearson mounted, the masked man swung himself up behind, grabbed the reins and set Silver off at a gallop. But they had only gone a few strides when Pearson's men burst their way out of their prison, picked up their guns and ran for horses.

The chase was on, and it was an uneven battle for Silver with two men on his back. Slowly the gang began to gain on the white horse, and it began to look as though the Lone Ranger would never get to Red Cloud with his prisoner, when

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suddenly an unexpected ally appeared over a ridge. It was the fort Commandant and some of his men.

"After them, Major!" shouted the Lone Ranger, pointing to the riders behind. The gang, seeing the soldiers, turned tail at once and started back towards the ranch, with the Major and his troopers after them.

The Lone Ranger did not slacken pace, however. He glanced upwards at the high noon sun and urged Silver to greater efforts . . .

Red Cloud was also looking up at the sun, then at the spear. The shadow on the ground was just about to disappear. He went to the spear, pulled it out, and went deliberately over to where the bound Tonto was standing.

"Shadow gone—time run out. Where white man now?"

Beads of sweat were standing on Tonto's forehead, but he looked at Red Cloud calmly and said: "Him come! Him my friend!"

"Fool!" sneered Red Cloud. "Long time I, too, try to be friend of white man. But white man betray me, just as he betray you. And because I listen to you, I let him escape. For that you die!"

The Apache drew back his spear to plunge it into Tonto's body, but at that instant there was a distant cry: "Tonto! Tonto!"

"Kemo Sabay!" shouted the Indian in reply.

Red Cloud turned as a big white horse came pounding towards him and reared to a stop.

"Here he is, Red Cloud!" The Lone Ranger swung himself to the ground. "Here's your murderer!"

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When the Lone Ranger and Tonto rode into Fort Apache with Pearson securely tied to an Indian pony's back, the Commandant came out to meet them.

"Welcome back, Ranger!" smiled the Major. "We have the rest of 'em in the guardhouse. This one makes my collection complete!"

"You can't arrest me!" protested Pearson indignantly. "I'm a civilian!"

"I'm not *arresting* you, Pearson," said the Major. "I'm merely placing you in protective custody till the Marshal arrives. *He* can arrest you all right!"

As Pearson was taken off to the guardhouse, the Lone Ranger took a broken arrow from his saddle-bag and handed it to the Commandant. "By the way, Major. Red Cloud sent you this. You know what it is?"

The Commandant looked at the arrow. "This is wonderful, Ranger! The broken arrow! Symbol of peace!"

The Lone Ranger wheeled Silver. "Tonto and I will be back for Pearson's trial, Major. Adios!"

"Wait!" cried the Major. "Come back here and be properly thanked. That's an order!"

The masked man turned in his saddle and smiled. "Civilians, Major. Remember we're civilians!"

A grin spread across the Commandant's weather-beaten face, as, with a wave of his hand, the masked man and his Indian comrade galloped out through the gate of the fort, out to new adventures; and back to the Commandant's ears came the cry: "Hi-yo, Silver! Awa-a-ay!"

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The Lone Ranger

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